
Śrī Braja Maṇḍala Parikramā

Preface

For those sincere *bhaktas* who deeply desire to enter into the sweetness of Śrī Braja Dhāma, this book is cause for great joy. It takes the faithful reader on an extraordinary journey through Braja, following the path taken annually on the Śrī Braja Maṇḍala Parikramā.

Śrī Braja Maṇḍala Parikramā was originally set in motion by Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu Himself. Śrī Śrīmad Bhakti-siddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura Prabhupāda re-established it in October 1932, and his dearmost disciple Śrī Śrīmad Bhakti Prajāna Keśava Gosvāmī Mahārāja sustained it in the decades that followed. Our beloved Gurudeva, *om viṣṇupāda aṣṭottaraśata* Śrī Śrīmad Bhaktivedānta Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja, who has been performing Braja Maṇḍala Parikramā since 1954, is keeping the tradition alive today – thus fulfilling the *mano'bhīṣṭha*, or inner heart's desire, of all the *ācāryas* in our line going up to Śrīman Mahāprabhu.

The Western world was first introduced to Śrī Braja Maṇḍala Parikramā by the causeless mercy of Śrī Śrīmad Bhaktivedānta Svāmī Mahārāja, who founded the Inter-national Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) in July 1966 and spread the teachings of Mahāprabhu to every corner of the world. Now, for more than twenty years, Śrīla Bhaktivedānta Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja has invested his energy into helping Western devotees gain a better appreciation of Śrī Braja Dhāma and enter more deeply into Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmīpāda's teachings on *bhakti* – especially many of the senior-most disciples of Śrīla Bhaktivedānta Svāmī Mahārāja. This English translation of *Śrī Braja Maṇḍala Parikramā* is another priceless gem that he is giving the English-speaking world.

This volume is basically a direct translation of the Hindi edition. We have made some slight changes to the order of the material, mostly to provide greater continuity. We have also corrected a number of minor mistakes in the Hindi edition, under the guidance of our Gurudeva and of Śrīmad Bhaktivedānta Mādhava Mahārāja, Śrīman Pundarīka dāsa Brahmācārī and Śrīman Mādhava Priya dāsa Brahmācārī, to whom I would like to express my thanks.

Where something in the Hindi edition is in fact intended to be ambivalent or ambiguous, we have left it that way. Thus, like the Hindi edition, the English rendition of *Śrī Braja Maṇḍala Parikramā* is not meant as a catalogue of information or data. Rather, it is meant to stir the heart of the faithful and inquisitive reader, inspiring him or her to understand the deeper and hidden meanings of Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa Yugala's sweet Braja pastimes directly from the lips of a pure Vaiṣṇava.

I am very grateful to Śrīmatī Janakī dāsī for translating *Śrī Braja Maṇḍala Parikramā* into English. She was assisted by Śrīmatī Manjulālī dāsī and Śrīman Gaura Hari dāsa. Śrīmatī Vaijayantī Mālā dāsī and Śrīman Sundara Gopāla dāsa edited the text and helped in various ways to bring this book to print. The manuscript was proofread by Śrīmatī Vicitrī dāsī, Śrīmatī Maṣjarī

dāsī and many others. Śrīman Kṛṣṇa Karuṇya dāsa Brahmācārī did the layout. Photographs for the book are courtesy of Śrīman Hemant Kumār, Śrīman Kaliya Damana dāsa, Śrīmatī Saradā dāsī, Śrīman Rūpa-Raghunātha dāsa Brahmācārī and others.

I would also like to extend my thanks to Śrīman Nanda Kiśora dāsa, Śrīman Purandara dāsa Brahmācārī, Śrīmatī Umā dīdī, Śrīmatī Vṛndāvana Vilāsinī dāsī, Śrīman Sudarśana dāsa, Śrīman Kiśora Kṛṣṇa dāsa, Śrīman Atula Kṛṣṇa dāsa and Śrīman Śrīnivāsa dāsa for helping out in various important ways. I also want to express my heart-felt gratitude to the *maṭhavāsīs* in the Mathurā Maṭha, under the guidance of Śrīman Premānanda dāsa Brahmācārī, who are always supporting the Western devotees by providing *hari-kathā*, *prasāda*, lodging and their hospitality in general.

Finally, I want to thank Śrīman Rādhā-Kānta dāsa, Śrīmatī Rati Kalā dāsī and Śrīman Rāma-Kānta dāsa, without whose generous financial contributions this production would not have been possible.

I humbly beg our readers to overlook any imperfections they might find in this production. All that is pleasing and that touches the heart is the result of the mercy of our Gurudeva, and any errors are due to my own inadequacies.

Aspiring to serve
Śrī Guru and the Vaiṣṇavas,
Śānti dāsī

Introduction

(to the Hindi edition)

In 1947, I took shelter of the lotus feet of *paramārādhya om viṣṇupāda* Śrī Śrīmad Bhakti Prajñāna Keśava Gosvāmī Mahārāja. From that time, by his causeless mercy, I received the good fortune to travel with him. On many occasions, I was highly blessed to perform *parikramā* and have *darśana* of holy places (*tīrthas*) throughout all of India. We visited *tīrthas* like Māyāpura Yogapīṭha (the birthplace of Śrī Gaurāṅga Mahāprabhu); the *dvīpas* (islands) of Śrīdhāma Navadvīpa; the *līlā-sthalīs* (pastimes-places) and other *tīrthas* of Gauḍa Maṇḍala; Vaidyanātha Deva-ghara; Mandāra Madhusūdana; Gayā; Kāśī; Prayāga; Ayodhyā; Naimiṣāraṇya; the *tīrthas* in South India marked by the lotus feet of Śrī Gaura; Dvārakā and other *tīrthas* of West India; Ajantā-Elorā of Central India; the *tīrthas* of Rājasthāna, such as Jaipura and Ajmer; and all the *līlā-sthalīs* of Braja Maṇḍala. Also, after Śrīla Gurudeva entered into *aprakṛta-līlā*, I was fortunate enough to have *darśana* and perform *parikramā* of these *līlā-sthalīs* and *tīrthas* several times under the guidance of the Śrī Gauḍīya Vedānta Samiti.

Above all, however, I received the great opportunity of performing Braja Maṇḍala Parikramā on foot each year with *paramārādhya* Śrī Gurudeva and some five hundred faithful devotees. *Paramārādhya* Śrī Gurudeva entrusted the responsibility of serving Śrī Keśavajī Gauḍīya Maṭha to me in 1954. Since then, I have annually been performing Braja Maṇḍala Parikramā with the

brahmacārīs of Śrī Keśavajī Gauḍīya Maṭha and some of the many devout and respectable residents of Mathurā. Thus, I have been fortunate enough to perform Braja Maṇḍala Parikramā almost fifty times in fifty years.

After the disappearance of Śrīla Gurupādapadma, I gave lectures during Śrī Braja Maṇḍala Parikramā on various pastime-places and their glories. A short compilation of these lectures was published in English in a book entitled *Śrī Vraja Maṇḍala Parikramā* a few years ago. This book was very highly regarded by faithful persons in India and abroad. Soon, all copies had sold out. Many devotees from all parts of the world have time and again asked for this book to be reprinted along with more *līlās* and glorifications so that it should cover the entire Braja Maṇḍala. I could not ignore their requests and began an attempt to fulfil their desire. However, I then left India and began travelling to various small and large countries across the world to preach *śuddha bhakti* as taught and practised by Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu. Thus, I was unable to complete this task for some time. At the same time, I also had other commitments in writing books on *bhakti* and suffered intermittent poor health. After returning from preaching abroad in July 1999, I wanted to finally complete this book, but was again obstructed by a sudden stroke of ill-health.

Under these circumstances, I decided to present myself at the lotus feet of Śrī Śacīnandana Gaurahari in the Gambhīra, at the lotus feet of Śrī Haridāsa Ṭhākura at Siddha Bakula, and at the lotus feet of *gaura-śakti* Śrī Gadādhara Prabhu at Ṭoṭa Gopīnātha in Śrī Jagannātha Purī. I resolved to complete this book there, only by their mercy. I stayed in Purī Dhāma for some time and on Viśvarūpa Mahotsava, 25 September 1999, completed the book *Braja Maṇḍala Parikramā*.

I have based this book on *Śrī Caitanya-bhāgavata*, *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, *Bhakti-ratnākara* by Śrī Narahari Cakravartī, *Braja-bhakti-vilāsa* by Śrī Nārāyaṇa Bhaṭṭa, and especially *Braja-maṇḍala Darśana (Parikramā)* compiled by Śrī Kṛṣṇadāsa Bābājī Mahārāja of Kusuma Sarovara. I have also collected various references to different *līlās* from *Govinda-līlāmṛta* by Śrī Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī, *Kṛṣṇa-bhāvanāmṛta* composed by *brajarasa rasika* Śrī Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura, and the various works of the Gosvāmīs. In this regard, I remember my Gurupādapadma, *paramārādhya aṣṭotaraśata* Śrī Śrīmad Bhakti Prajñāna Keśava Gosvāmī Mahārāja, by whose mercy I obtained everything on the subject of Braja Maṇḍala Parikramā and the various pastime-places in Braja. I have strung together these various recollections along with the references to various pastime-places from different literatures. Before meeting my Gurupādapadma and receiving his causeless mercy, my life was void.

Śrīmad Bhaktivedānta Mādhava Mahārāja, Śrīmad Bhaktivedānta Tīrtha Mahārāja, Śrīman Omprakāśa Brajabāsī 'Sāhityaratna', Śrīman Purandara Brahmacārī 'Sevāvighraha', Śrīman Vakreśvara Brahmacārī, Śrīman Parameśvarī Brahmacārī, Śrīman Kṛṣṇa Kāruṇya Brahmacārī, and others have helped in preparing the manuscript, proof reading and performing

various other duties. Their service endeavours are noteworthy and glorious. Besides them, Śrīman Premānanda Brahmācārī has done a praiseworthy *sevā* by collecting the funds for publishing this book. My prayer is that Śrī Śrī Guru-Gaurāṅga-Gāndharvikā-Giridhārī may shower Their abundant mercy and blessings upon them.

Begging for a particle of the mercy of Śrī Guru,
Śrī Bhaktivedānta Nārāyaṇa

Śrī Śārada Pūrṇimā
Paramārādhyaṭama om viṣṇupāda Śrī Śrīmad
Bhakti Prajñāna Keśava Gosvāmī Mahārāja's
tirobhāva-tithi
13 October 2000 (26 Āśvina, 2057 Saṁvat)
brajati gacchati iti brajaḥ

Part 1

Chapter 1

The Nature of Braja

"That which moves around is *braja*" – this is the original understanding of the word *braja*. Those places where Nanda Bābā resided with his cows, calves, associates and family members are included in the meaning of this word. *Brajanti gāvaḥ yasminnati brajaḥ*: "The land where the cows, *gopālas*, *gopas* and *gopīs* wander is known as *braja*." This term particularly denotes the realm of Svayaṁ Bhagavān Brajendra-nandana Śrī Kṛṣṇa's pastimes.

Braja-bihārī Śrī Kṛṣṇa is *akhila rasāmṛta-murti*, the embodiment of the nectar of all primary and secondary *rasas*. In this Braja, He performs His pastimes eternally with His associates, and especially with Śrīmatī Rādhikā, who is the embodiment of *mahābhāva* (the essence of His *hladinī-śakti*). The most exalted of all *rasamaya līlās* (nectar-filled pastimes), namely, His *rāsa-līlā*, as well as a multitude of other pastimes take place here eternally. In this Braja, every glance and gesture is full of *rasa*. Here, *ādi-puruṣa* Śrī Govinda eternally enjoys nectar-filled sports and pastimes with His *svarūpabhūtā gopīs*, who have emanated from His own *svarūpa*. These pastimes have no beginning and no end. That place in which there is nothing but an endless ocean of *prema*, whose waves of *unnatojjvala praṇaya rasa* (the most elevated, radiant mellow of intimate paramour love) are constantly rising up and swelling over, is Braja. That place which consists purely of *rasa* that is relished continuously by *rasikas* and *bhavukas* is the land of Braja.

Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam (10.44.13) gives a deeply moving description of Braja:

puṇyā bata braja-bhuvo yad ayam nṛ-liṅga
gūḍhaḥ purāṇa-puruṣo vana-citra-mālyah
gāḥ pālayan saha-balaḥ kvaṇayaṁś ca veṇuṁ
vikṛḍayāṣcati giritra-ramārcitāṅghriḥ

“*Sakhī!* The actual truth is that the land of Braja is supremely pure and blessed, because here Puruṣottama, the Supreme Person, is living incognito, disguised as a human being. That same Prabhu, whose lotus feet are worshipped by *devādidēva* Mahādeva Śaṅkara and Śrī Ramādevī, wanders about here together with His brother Balarāmajī and His *sakhās*. Adorned with a colourful flower garland, He plays the flute sweetly and grazes the cows. Thus absorbed in many kinds of pastimes, He wanders here and there in great delight. By the touch of His lotus feet, this land of Braja has become virtuous and successful.”

The *Skanda Purāṇa* also presents a beautiful definition of the word *braja*:

*guṇātītaṁ paraṁ brahma
vyāpakaṁ braja ucyate
sadānandaṁ paraṁ jyoti
muktānāṁ padavyayam*

“Parabrahma is beyond the three modes – goodness, passion and ignorance – and because He pervades every single particle of the universe, He is called *braja*. His place, the embodiment of *sac-cid-ānanda*, is supremely brilliant and indestructible. *Parama rasikas* liberated from material existence reside here.”

Goloka and Braja (Gokula)

Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta (Ādi-līlā 5.17) states:

*sarvopari śrī-gokula – brajaloka-dhāma
śrī-goloka, śvetadvīpa, vṛndāvana nāma*

“Śrī Gokula, the topmost abode, has many names – Braja, Goloka, Śvetadvīpa and Vṛndāvana.” Thus, these names are all considered synonymous. Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī, the intimate associate of Śrīman Mahāprabhu, resolves any confusion about Gokula and Goloka in his book *Śrī Laghu-Bhāgavatāmṛta – yattu golokanāma syāttacca gokula-vaibhavam*, and *tādātmya-vaibhatvaṣca tasya tanmahimonnateḥ*. He states here that the glory of Gokula is identical with the glory of Goloka. In fact, Goloka is merely the glory of Gokula. Similar-ly, Vṛndāvana and Gokula are simply different names for Braja.

The second *śloka* of *Brahma-saṁhitā* describes this Gokula Dhāma:

*sahasra-patra-kamalaṁ / gokulākhyam mahat-padam
tat karṇikāra-tad-dhāma / tad-anantārṁśa-sambhavam*

Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura has explained the meaning of this *śloka* in the following words: “Mahā-Vaikuṇṭha, or Paravyoma Dhāma, is eternally situated beyond the Virajā River. This *dhāma* is the embodiment of the three *vibhūtis*, or divine opulences, being imperishable (*amṛta*), devoid of sorrow (*aśoka*), and free from all types of fear (*abhaya*). The extremely sweet Gokula, otherwise known as Goloka, which is full of unlimited transcendental opulence, is situated beyond that Paravyoma Dhāma. Sometimes Goloka is also called Gokula, but Goloka is actually the opulence (*vaibhava*) or

manifestation of Gokula, the abode of all sweet pastimes (*mādhurya-līlās*). This *dhāma*, radiant as Goloka or Gokula, appears in the form of Gokula below Vaikuṇṭha on the Earth planet.”

In *Śrī Bṛhad-bhāgavatāmṛta*, the quintessence of all *śāstra*, Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī writes:

*yathā krīḍati tadbhumau / goloke’pi tathaiva saḥ
adha ūrdhvatayā bhedo / ‘nayoḥ kalpyeta kevalam*

“Kṛṣṇa’s activities in Gokula, which is situated on the material plane, are the same as those in Goloka. The only difference between Goloka and Gokula is that Goloka is situated in the highest region and Gokula manifests on the Earth planet.” In *Kṛṣṇa-sandarbha*, Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī has accepted Goloka as the manifestation of Vṛndāvana.¹

Braja: the eternal abode of parakīyā-bhāva

In *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta* (Ādi-līlā 4.47), Śrīla Kavirāja Gosvāmī states:

*parakīyā-bhāve ati rasera ullāsa
braja binā ihāra anyatra nāhi vāsa*

Śrī Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura comments in his *Amṛta-pravāha-bhāṣya* on this verse: “Many people think that Śrī Kṛṣṇa is performing His pastimes eternally in Goloka and appears in Braja for a short time just to perform His pastimes in *parakīyā-bhāva*, the mood of unwedded amorous love. This, however, is not the opinion of our Gauḍīya *gosvāmīs*, who accept the *braja-līlās* as eternal also. Braja is the name of the absolute inner chamber of the transcendental and eternal Goloka Dhāma. The same *līlās* Śrī Kṛṣṇa performs in Vṛndāvana on Earth, including *parakīyā-rasa*, transpire eternally in the supremely situated, eternal Braja Dhāma.”

Śrīla Kavirāja Gosvāmī states in *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta* (Ādi-līlā 3.10):

*aṣṭāvimśa catur-yuge dvāparera śeṣe
brajera sahita haya kṛṣṇera prakāśe*

Here the words *brajera sahita*, ‘along with Braja’, clarify that in the transcendental Goloka Dhāma there exists also one inconceivably sweet abode named Braja. Śrī Kṛṣṇa appeared on Earth along with this very abode by the help of His *acintya-śakti*. *Parakīyā-rasa* is permanently present only in this eternal Braja, which lies within the inner chambers of Goloka. This is because *parakīyā-rasa*, the supermost mellow, is present there with qualities that are unlimitedly superior to those found anywhere else in Goloka.

Even in *prakaṭa* Braja, or Bhauma Vṛndāvana (Vṛndāvana manifest on this Earth planet), the *jīvas* have been able to directly witness the variegatedness (*vicitratā*) of *aprakaṭa* Braja. Besides the *prakaṭa prakāśa* and *aprakaṭa prakāśa*, the only remaining mystery is that on Earth there is a *dṛśyamāna prakāśa* also, which is the vision that ordinary people have of Vṛndāvana and other *dhāmas* after the *līlās* there are no longer visible.

Braja: land of enchanting beauty and sweetness

Brahma-saṁhitā (5.56) describes Vṛndāvana Dhāma, or Goloka, in this way:

*śriyaḥ kāntāḥ kāntaḥ parama-puruṣaḥ kalpa-taravo
 drumā bhūmiś cintāmaṇi-gaṇa-mayī toyam amṛtam
 kathā gānaṁ nāṭyaṁ gamanam api vaṁśī priya-sakhī
 cid-ānandaṁ jyotiḥ param api tad āsvādyam api ca
 sa yatra kṣīrābdhiḥ sravati surabhībhyaś ca su-mahān
 nimeṣārdhākhyo vā vrajati na hi yatrāpi samayaḥ
 bhaje śvetadvīpaṁ tam aham iha golokam iti yaṁ
 vidantas te santaḥ kṣiti-virala-cārāḥ katipaye*

“I worship that supreme abode known as Śvetadvīpa, where *parama-puruṣa* Brajendra-nandana Śrī Kṛṣṇa is the only *kānta* (lover); where His *svarūpabhūtā braja-gopīs*, the embodiment of all Lakṣmīs, are the *kāntās* (beloveds); where every tree and creeper is a transcendental *kalpa-taru* (desire tree); where the earth is *cintāmaṇi* (spiritual touchstone) and the water is *amṛta* (nectar); where speech is like music and movements are like dance; where the *vaṁśī* is the *priya sakhī*; where the light is full of knowledge and bliss; where the supreme, transcendental objects are all tasty and delectable; where great divine oceans of milk always flow from the udders of uncountable numbers of *surabhī* cows; and where eternal, transcendental time is ever present – devoid of past and future – and where even half a moment therefore never enters the past. In this material world, only rare *sādhus* have *darśana* of this *dhāma* as Goloka, and only those who are the objects of Gokulapati Śrī Kṛṣṇa’s mercy can understand the nature of this *dhāma*.”

The *Rg-veda* (1st *maṇḍala*, *sūkta* 154) also describes Braja Dhāma:

*tā vāṁ vāstūnyuśmasi gamadhyai / yatra gāvo bhūriśṛṅgā ayāsaḥ
 atrāha tadurūgāyasya vṛṣṇāḥ / paramaṁ padamavabhāti bhūri*

“Braja Vṛndāvana is Bhagavān’s topmost *dhāma*: there, *parama-puruṣa* Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the object of the *Vedas*, sweetly plays His flute and protects the roaming cows, who have many good qualities and beautiful horns.”

In *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (10.21.10), the *gopīs* themselves sing the glories of Vṛndāvana:

*vṛndāvanaṁ sakhi bhuvo vitanoti kīrtiṁ
 yad devakī-suta-padāmbuja-labdha-lakṣmi
 govinda-veṇuṁ anu matta-mayūra-nṛtyaṁ
 prekṣyādri-sānv-avaratānya-samasta-sattvam*

“O *sakhī*! The fame of the Earth is enhanced due to being splendidly decorated with the marks of Śrī Kṛṣṇa’s lotus feet. Upon hearing the *veṇunāda* (sound of the flute), the peacocks take it as the thunder of the clouds and, becoming intoxicated, begin to dance. The other animals in the meadows of Govardhana also feel pleasure and become stunned. Thus, the presence of Śrī Vṛndāvana on the Earth makes this planet even more glorious than Vaikuṇṭha.”

The *gopīs* are saying, “O *sakhī!* Everywhere throughout this Vṛndāvana bloom flowers of all the six seasons – *belī, jūhī, camelī, campaka, kadamba* and so many others. Their fragrance reaches far and wide, inviting the bees to partake of their honey. They come in swarms to drink this *rasa* and, becoming intoxicated, start humming. This sound seems to be coming from Vana-devī, the goddess of the forest, who is anticipating the arrival of *madhupati* Kṛṣṇa and is welcoming Him. Hearing the bees’ humming, how can the *śuka, pika, papīha* and other birds whose voices are sweet and melodious remain silent? They also become submerged in ecstasy and fly from one tree to another and from one branch to the next. All of Vṛndāvana resonates to their sweet, melodious singing, the echo of which reverberates everywhere throughout Vṛndāvana – in the ponds, across the rivers, and over the hills.

“Aho! Vṛndāvana is such an extraordinary and astonishing *dhāma*. In this Vṛndāvana, the unique splendour of Vasanta (spring), which is the charmingly sweet queen of all seasons, is ever present, and a green velvety carpet is spread over the surface of the earth. Lotuses of many colours bloom in the ponds and rivers, and the branches of the trees are well adorned with fully-bloomed *campā, camelī, belī, jūhī* and other delightfully fragrant flowers, whose nectar is relished by intoxicated bees. The entire atmosphere is pervaded with both transcendental bliss and the intoxication of youth. These combine to create a kingdom of ever-increasing joy that captivates the body and mind.”

Playing sweetly on His flute, Brajendra-nandana Śrī Kṛṣṇa roams throughout this land of Braja along with Dāu Bhaiyā and Their innumerable *gopa* friends and cows. Blessed is this land of Braja, where the creator of this universe, Śrī Brahmājī, dwells in the form of a mountain range in Varsānā, just to have the dust of the lotus feet of Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa Yugala on his head; where the maintainer, Śrī Viṣṇu, has assumed the forms of Govardhana and Viṣṇu Parvata; where Candramaulī Mahādeva has taken up residence as Nandīśvara Hill in Nandagrāma; and where Śrī Uddhavajī, the best of Hari’s servants (*haridāsa-vara*), lives as a blade of grass, a small shrub or a creeper on the bank of Kusuma Sarovara.

Here in Braja, Svayaṁ Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa becomes the calves and relishes the tender and delicious grass.² Here the young girls of Braja daily go to the wells and other sources of water (*panaghaṭas*) on the pretext of filling their water-pots, but in fact go only to fill the pots of their hearts with the *rasa* of *kṛṣṇa-prema*. *Panaghaṭa jāna dai rī, panaghaṭa jāta hai* – “O my friend! Please let me go to the *panaghaṭa*, otherwise the *pana* (resolve) to meet my beloved will decrease (*ghaṭa jāegā*).” To protect this resolve, the young girls of Braja would crowd the *panaghaṭa*, carrying their clay pots. At this *rasīla* (*rasa*-filled) place, the Braja girls begin to dip their pots in the water on the pretext of filling them. Then, the *rasīlī* flute of the crown-jewel of all *rasikas* fills the air with *rasa*. Who even notices whether these girls of Braja fill their

pots or bring them back empty? O my friend! This is the wonder of that *panaghaṭa*.

Rasika-śekhara Brajendra-nandana repeatedly drowns in *rasa* – in the sweet *nikuṣjas* that echo with the rippling sounds of the Kālindī, and in the twisted and narrow *rasīlī* lanes. He drowns in the *rasīlī* teasing of the *rasīlī* girls of Braja – in the heated disputes He has with them, in their crooked, sweet glances, in the sweet conversations and water-sports He enjoys with them. Who can describe the glories of such a Braja?

Śrī Sanātana Gosvāmī has explained the meaning of Vṛndāvana in the following way: *vṛndasya samūhasya, avanam rakṣaṇam pālanaṁ yasmāt tat vṛndāvanaṁ*. “That which maintains, nourishes and protects everyone is called Vṛndāvana.” This land of Vṛndāvana conceals its godly nature (*bhagavad-bhāva*) and lovingly maintains the herds of cows and calves, and the society of *gopas* and *gopīs*. Svayaṁ Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa, being controlled by their love, does not leave Vṛndāvana even for a moment – *vṛndāvanaṁ parityajya sa kvacin naiva gacchati* (Cc. Antya 1.67; quoted in *Laghu-bhāgavatāmṛta* 1.5.461).

Śrī Bhaṭṭājī describes the land of Braja as enchanting, and expresses this with exquisite feelings:

*brajbhūmi mohinī maiṁ jānī
mohinī kuṣj, mohan śrī-vṛndāvan mohan jamunā pānī
mohinī nārī sakal gokul kī bolti mohinī bānī
śrī-bhaṭṭ ke prabhu mohan nāgar mohinī rādhā rānī*

“Brajabhūmi is enchanting – the *kuṣjas* are enchanting, Śrī Vṛndāvana is enchanting, and the waters of the Yamunā are enchanting. All the women of the entire Gokula are enchantresses who speak in an enchanting way. Śrī Bhaṭṭa’s master and mistress are Mohana Nāgara and Mohinī Rādhārānī.”

Chapter 2

The Borders of Braja

Braja Maṇḍala extends for eighty-four *kosas* (about 168 miles). *Garga Saṁhita* (*khaṇḍa* 2) states:

*prāgudīcyāṁ bahirśado
dakṣiṇasyāṁ yadoḥ purāt
paścimāyāṁ śoṇitapurān
māthuraṁ maṇḍalaṁ viduḥ*

“That land between Bahirśad (Barhada) in the north-east, Yadupura (the village Baṭeśvara of Śūrasena) in the south and Śoṇitpura (Sonhada) in the west, and which measures eighty-four *kosas*, has been called Mathurā Maṇḍala, or Braja, by learned persons.” Sir Growse in his *Mathurā Memoirs* writes the following verse:

*it barhad it sonhad, ut sūrsen ko gaon
braj caurāsī kos mein, mathurā maṇḍal maṁh*

It is clear from this that the boundary of Braja is considered to be Bara on one side, Sonhada on the other, and Baṭeśvara, or the village of Śūrasena, on the third side. Bara is situated in the present district of Aligarh in the north-east corner of Braja Maṇḍala. Sonhada lies in the present district of Guḍagaon in the state of Harayāṇā, which is in the north-west corner of Braja Maṇḍala. Its ancient name is Soṇitpura. The village of Śūrasena is the village of Baṭeśvara in the revenue district of Bāha. The area between these places is called Braja Maṇḍala.

The borders of Braja Maṇḍala are also mentioned in the *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*.¹ According to this *Purāṇa*, Hāsyavana, Janhuvana, Parvatavana and Sūryapattanavana lie in the east, south, west and north of Braja Maṇḍala respectively. Corresponding to this description, Hasanagaḍha of the Agra district, which lies in the east, is known as Hāsyavana; in the west, Bahādī Grāma near Kāmyavana in Rājasthāna is known as Parvatavana; in the south, Jājaū Grāma of the Dhaulapura revenue district is famous as Janhu; and in the north, near Jevara Grāma of the Aligarh district, lies Sūryapattanavana.

In the eighty-four *kosas* of Braja Maṇḍala, there are forty-eight *vanas* (forests), which include *upavanas*, *prativanas* and *adhivasas*. According to the *Padma Purāṇa*, there are twelve principal forests situated east and west of the Yamunā. They are (1) Mahāvana, (2) Kāmyavana, (3) Madhuvana, (4) Tālavana, (5) Kumudavana, (6) Bhāṇḍīra-vana, (7) Vṛndāvana, (8) Khadīravana, (9) Lohavana, (10) Bhadravana, (11) Bahulāvana, and (12) Baelvana. Of these twelve forests, seven lie on the western side of the Yamunā. They are Madhuvana, Tālavana, Kumudavana, Bahulāvana, Kāmyavana, Khadīravana and Vṛndāvana. The remaining five forests – Bhadravana, Bhāṇḍīrvana, Baelvana, Lohavana and Mahāvana – are situated on the Yamunā's eastern side.

The *Varāha Purāṇa* mentions twelve *upavanas*: (1) Brahmavana, (2) Apsarāvana, (3) Vihvalavana, (4) Kadambavana, (5) Svarṇavana, (6) Surabhīvana, (7) Premavana, (8) Mayūravana, (9) Māneṅgitavana, (10) Śeṣaśāyīvana, (11) Nāradavana, and (12) Paramānandavana.

The *Bhaviṣya Purāṇa* mentions the following twelve *prativanas*: (1) Raṅkavana, (2) Vārttāvana, (3) Karahāvana, (4) Kāmavana, (5) Aṣṭjanavana, (6) Karṇavana, (7) Kṛṣṇākṣi-panavana, (8) Nandaprekṣaṇa Kṛṣṇavana, (9) Indravana, (10) Śikṣāvana, (11) Candrāvalīvana, and (12) Lohavana.

Finally, the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* describes the following twelve *adhivasas*: (1) Mathurā, (2) Rādhā Kuṇḍa, (3) Nandagaon, (4) Gaḍha, (5) Lalitā Grāma, (6) Vṛṣabhānupura, (7) Gokula, (8) Balabhadravana, (9) Govardhana, (10) Jāvaṭa, (11) Vṛndāvana, and (12) Saṅketvana. This adds up to make forty-eight forests in all.

Chapter 3

How to Observe

Braja Maṇḍala Parikramā

Saṅkalpa at Viśrāma Ghāṭa

efore starting Braja Maṇḍala Parikramā, one should take a *saṅkalpa* (vow) at Viśrāma Ghāṭa in Mathurā. Preferably, this *saṅkalpa* should be made through the medium of a bona fide *rūpānuga guru* or *rūpānuga Vaiṣṇava*. Otherwise, it should be made through any simple-hearted *bhakta*, *tīrtha guru* or Brajabāsī priest who is learned in *śāstra* and *tattva*, who is virtuous, merciful, non-envious, not avaricious, and who is engaged in *bhajana*. When the *saṅkalpa* is taken, *parikramā* may begin.

The Rules for Braja Maṇḍala Parikramā

While performing *parikramā*, one should as far as possible observe certain positive and negative injunctions. The positive injunctions are as follows: to speak the truth, to observe celibacy, to sleep on the ground, to forgive the *aparādhās* (offences) of others, to take bath in the holy rivers or ponds, to do *ācamana*, to accept only *prasāda* offered to Bhagavān, and to perform *harināma-kīrtana* on Tulasī beads or perform *harināma-saṅkīrtana* in the assembly of Vaiṣṇavas. One should perform *parikramā* by showing proper respect to and worshipping the *brāhmaṇas*, *śrī mūrtis*, *tīrthas* and Bhagavān's pastime-places encountered during the course of the *parikramā*. Coming now to the negative injunctions, it is prohibited to become angry; to commit any violence towards trees, creepers, small shrubs, cows and so forth along the *parikramā* path; to dishonour *brāhmaṇas*, Vaiṣṇavas, and so on; to disrespect *śrī mūrti*; to use soap and oil; to shave; to kill ants and other *jīvas*; to involve oneself in disputes; and to criticize others.

The Timing of the Parikramā

Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas follow Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu's own journey through Braja. Hence, some people start their *parikramā* after Vijayā Daśamī in the month of Āśvina in autumn. This is because, according to *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, Śrīman Mahāprabhu arrived from Śrī Nīlācala Dhāma at this time to have *darśana* of Braja Maṇḍala. Other Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas start their *parikramā* and Kārtika-vrata *niyama-sevā* on the Ekādaśī of the bright fortnight in the month of Āśvina and complete their *vrata* on Devotthāna Ekādaśī of the bright fortnight in the month of Kārtika. Most Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas, however, make their *saṅkalpa* for both Kārtika *niyama-sevā* (or *ūrjā-vrata*) and Braja Maṇḍala Parikramā on Śāradīyā Pūrṇimā. They then complete the Kārtika-vrata and Braja Maṇḍala Parikramā after Devotthāna Ekādaśī on Kārtika Pūrṇimā.

The Vaiṣṇavas of the Nimbārka Sampradāya start Braja Maṇḍala Parikramā on the Daśamī after Śrī Kṛṣṇa-janmāṣṭhamī. They complete their *parikramā* in one and a half months. The Vaiṣṇavas of Puṣṭi-mārga (the Vallabha Sampradāya) start their *parikramā* on the Daśamī or Ekādaśī after Śrī Rādhāṣṭamī and complete it in approximately two months.

Chapter 4

Places Visited on

Braja Maṇḍala Parikramā

Pilgrims on Braja Maṇḍala Parikramā have *darśana* of the pastime-places of Braja Maṇḍala in the order given below. Some places appear more than once in this list, because there are often alternative routes to get from one place to another.

Braja Maṇḍala Parikramā begins in Śrī Mathurā. After having *darśana* of this city, pilgrims visit the forests of Madhuvana, Tālavana and Kumudavana. Then they proceed to Śāntanu Kuṇḍa, Gandheśvara, Bahulāvana, Rāl, Magherā, Jaita, Śakaṭīkarā (Chaṭṭīkarā) and Garuḍa-Govinda. From Garuḍa-Govinda, one can go to Bahulāvana if one has not already done so. Pilgrims then visit Maro, Datihā (Datīyā), Aḍiga, Mādhurī Kuṇḍa, Jakhīnagaon, Toṣa, Janatī, Vasatī, Mukharāī, Śrī Rādhā Kuṇḍa and Śrī Śyāma Kuṇḍa.

After this, pilgrims make their way to Kusuma Sarovara, Nārada Kuṇḍa, Gvālā Puṣkariṇi, Yugala Kuṇḍa, Killola Kuṇḍa, Mānasī Gaṅgā, the town of Govardhana, Indradhvajavedī and Jamunāvati. From there, one proceeds to Parāsaulī, Painṭhāgaon and Bachagaon (Vatsavana), and then to Ānyora Gaon, Gaurī Kuṇḍa, Saṅkarṣaṇa Kuṇḍa, Govinda Kuṇḍa, Navala Kuṇḍa, Apsarā Kuṇḍa, Śakra Kuṇḍa, Pūcharī, Śyāmaḍhāka, Rāghava Paṇḍita's cave, Surabhī Kuṇḍa, Airāvata Kuṇḍa, Harajī Kuṇḍa, Jatīpurā, Bilachu Kuṇḍa and Cakreśvara Mahādeva.

Thereafter, one comes to Sakhī-sthalī, Nīmagaon, Pāḍara, Kuṣjerā, Pāli, Ḍerāvali, Māna, Sāhāra, Sūrya Kuṇḍa, Peraku, Bhādāra, Konāī and Vasatī. One can now have *darśana* of Śrī Rādhā Kuṇḍa and Govardhana if one has not already done so. Pilgrims then make their way to Jāvaka Kuṇḍa, Gulāla Kuṇḍa, Gānṭholī, Beheja, Devaśīrṣa, Muniśīrṣa, Paramādanā, Badrīnārāyaṇa, Guhānā, Khoṇ, Ālīpura, Ādibadrī, Paśopā, Kedāranātha, Bilonda, Caraṇa Pahāḍī, Bhojana Thālī and Kāmyavana.

After Kāmyavana, one goes to Vajerā, Sunaharā Kadamba-khaṇḍī, Ūṣcāgaon, Sakhīgiri Parvata, Varsānā, Gahavara-vana, Ḍabhorā, Rasolī, Prema Sarovara, Saṅket, Riṭhaura, Meherāna, Satvāsa, Nanderā, Bhojana Thālī, Nunerā, Śṛṅgāra Vaṭa, Bichoravana, Vanacarī, Hoḍal, Dahīgaon, Lālpura, Kāmera, Harāvalī Gaon, Sāṣculī, Geṇḍo, Nandagaon, Kadamba Ṭer and Jāvaṭa. Thereafter, pilgrims visit Dhanaśīṅgā, Kosī, Payagaon, Chattravana, Sāmārī, Narī, Sāṅkhī, Ārabāḍī, Raṇavāḍī, Bhādāvalī, Khāmpura, Ūmrāva, Raheyā, Kāmāī, Karehlā, Pesāī, Ludhaulī, Āṣjanaka, Khadīravana and Bijavārī. One can now also visit Nandagaon if one has not already done so.

Pilgrims now make their way to Kokilāvana, Choṭī Baiṭhana, Baḍī Baiṭhana, Caraṇa Pahāḍī, Rasaulī, Koṭvana, Khāmī, Śeṣaśāī, Rūpanagara, Majhaī, Rāmapura, Ūjānī, Khelanavana, Obe, Rāma Ghāṭa, Kāśraṭa, Akṣaya Vaṭa, Gopī Ghāṭa (Tapovana), Cīra Ghāṭa, Nanda Ghāṭa and Bhaya-gaon. After this come Jaitapura, Hājarā, Balīhārā, Bājanā, Jeolāī, Śakaroyā, Āṭāsa, Devīāṭāsa, Parkhama, Caumā, Ajaī, Siṅhānā, Rehānā, Pasaulī, Baraulī, Taraulī, Eī, Seī, Māī, Basāī and Nanda Ghāṭa.

Thereafter, one crosses the Yamunā to have *darśana* of Bhadravana, Bhāṇḍīravana, Māṭa, Baelvana, Māna Sarovara, Ārā, Pānīgaon, Lohavana, Rāvel, Gaḍhuī, Āyaro, Kṛṣṇapura, Bāṇḍī, Dāūjī, Hātaurā, Brahmāṇḍa Ghāṭa,

Cintāharaṇa Ghāṭa, Mahāvana, Gokula, Kailo and Bādāī Grāma. Crossing the Yamunā again, one comes to Naurāṅgābād, Śrī Mathurā, Akrūra Ghāṭa and Śrī Vṛndāvana with its twelve forests – Bhātrōl (Aṭalavana), Kyārīvana, Bihāravana, Gocāraṇavana, Kālīya Damanavana, Gopālavana, Nikuṣjavana (Sevā Kuṣja), Nidhuvana, Rādhāvana (Rādhā Bāga), Jhūlanavana, Gahavaravana and Papaḍavana.

Braja Maṇḍala's sixteen banyan trees

On their journey through Braja Maṇḍala, pilgrims may be fortunate enough to have *darśana* of the following prominent banyan trees (*vaṭas*):

Mountains in Braja Maṇḍala

Pilgrims on Braja Maṇḍala Parikramā will visit or pass close by the following hills or mountains (*parvatas*):

- 1) Girirāja-Govardhana
- 2) Setu Kandarā Parvata – Ādibadrī Nārāyaṇa
- 3) Sāṅgrāśikara Parvata – Jhūlana Sthāna
- 4) Nīla Parvata – near Śāṅarā Śikhara
- 5) Ānandādrī Parvata – near Śāṅarā Śikhara
- 6) Udyāna Parvata
- 7) Śaṅkhakūṭa Parvata
- 8) Ādi Kedāranātha Parvata – near Kāmyavana
- 9) Caraṇa Pahāḍī
- 10) Indrasena Parvata (stone slide)
- 11) Vyomāsura Gufā (cave)
- 12) Bhojana Thālī
- 13) Viṣṇu-cihna-pāda Parvata
- 14) Luklukī Kandarā
- 15) Bājana Śilā (musical stone)
- 16) Suvarṇācala – Sunaharā Gaon
- 17) Caraṇa Pahāḍī – Nandagaon
- 18) Aṭorā Parvata – Ūṣcāgaon
- 19) Sakhīgiri Parvata – Ūṣcāgaon
- 20) Viṣṇu Parvata – Varsānā
- 21) Brahma Parvata – Varsānā
- 22) Nandīśvara or Rudra Parvata – Nandagaon
- 23) Choṭī (small) Caraṇa Pahāḍī – near Baiṭhana

Part 2

Chapter 1

Śrī Mathurā

The Glories of Śrī Mathurā

There are seven abodes on earth that award *mokṣa* (liberation). They are Ayodhyā, Mathurā, Māyā, Kāśī, Kāṣcī, Avantī and Dvārāvatī. Of these, Mathurā, the birthplace of Svayaṁ Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa, is the topmost. This abode not only awards *mokṣa*, but also bestows *bhagavat-prema*. It is completely beyond *māyā* and is a *sac-cid-ānandamaya dhāma* of Bhagavān.

It is protected by the Sudarśana Cakra, and is therefore not affected by the universal dissolution (*pralaya*) or other disruptions. What to speak of Vaikuṇṭha, it is even more praiseworthy than Dvārakāpurī, whose ornament is Kṛṣṇa's queens.¹

This city of Mathurā is never annihilated. In the beginning of Satya-yuga, the child Dhruva met Devarṣi Nārada here. The boy took bath in the Yamunā at Dhruva Ghāṭa and accepted the *nāma-mantra* of Bhagavān from Nāradaḥ. Nearby at Madhuvana Maholī, he attained perfection in the worship of Bhagavān.

Also in Satya-yuga, Durvāsā Ṛṣi arrived here while Mahārāja Ambarīṣa was in the course of breaking his *dvādaśī-vrata*, and it was here that Durvāsā realised the glory of *bhakta* Mahārāja Ambarīṣa. Even today, Cakra Tīrtha and Ambarīṣa Tīlā stand as witnesses to how Ambarīṣa Mahārāja was protected by the Sudarśana Cakra.

In Tretā-yuga, Śrī Śatrughnājī killed Lavaṇāsura, the son of Madhudaitya, at this place on the order of Śrī Rāmacandra. Everyone knows this incident. In Dvāpara-yuga, Mathurā acquired prestige as the place of Śrī Kṛṣṇa's birth and many other *līlās*. It is also commonly known that Śrī Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana Vedavyāsa took birth here on an island in the Yamunā.

In Kali-yuga, Svayaṁ Bhagavān Śrī Śacīnandana Gaurahari, endowed with the lustre and *bhāva* of Śrī Rādhā, came to Braja Dhāma to take *darśana*. The first place He reached was Mathurā, where He took bath at Viśrāma Ghāṭa. He then took *darśana* of the pastime-places within the eighty-four *kosas* of Braja Maṇḍala. One can also find descriptions of Śrī Advaita Ācārya, Śrī Nityānanda Prabhu, Śrī Lokanātha Gosvāmī and Śrī Bhūgarbha Gosvāmī's coming here before Caitanya Mahāprabhu. Intimate associates of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu, such as Śrīla Rūpa, Sanātana and other *gosvāmīs*, came to Mathurā and Braja after Him and roamed throughout this land. *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta* and *Bhakti-ratnākara* further describe how later on all our Gauḍīya *ācāryās* came to Mathurā Braja Maṇḍala.

The abundant glories of Mathurā Purī are described in the *Purāṇas*. Bhagavān Śrī Keśavajī is present in the middle of this *purī*, which is likened to the whorl of a lotus. On the north petal is Śrī Govinda Devajī (in Vṛndāvana), by whose *darśana* a person is forever liberated from the cycle of birth and death. On the eastern petal, at Viśrāma Ghāṭa, is a form of Bhagavān named Viśrānti and on the southern petal is Ādi Varāha Deva, who bestows all-perfection.²

Taking bath anywhere in Mathurā destroys all the sins of the *jīvas*, and one gathers the fruit of performing an *aśvamedha-yajña* at every step. Bhagavān Himself says in the *Ādi Varāha Purāṇa*:

*na vidyate ca pātāle / nāntarīkṣe na mānuṣe
samasta mathurāyāṁ hi / priyaṁ mama vasundhare*

"O Vasundhare! It is certain that in Pātāla Loka (hell), in the world of humans or in the celestial realm, no other place is as dear to Me as Mathurā."

He also states in that same *Purāṇa*:

*prthivyāṁ yāni tīrthāni / āsamudrasarāṁsi ca
mathurāyāṁ gamiṣyanti / mayi supte vasundhare*

“O Vasundhare! During My time of sleep (Cāturmāsya), all the holy places (*tīrthas*), oceans and lakes dwell in Mathurā.”

It is mentioned in the *Skanda Purāṇa* that the result one attains by residing in any other part of Bhāratavarṣa (India) for hundreds and thousands of years is attained simply by remembering the city of Mathurā.³ That person who performs *japa* and *upavāsa* (fasting) in Śrī Mathurā becomes free from all sins by taking *darśana* of the birthplace of Śrī Kṛṣṇa.⁴ That sinful person who has killed a *brāhmaṇa*, who is a drunkard, who kills cows, and who has fallen from celibacy becomes free of his sins merely by doing *parikramā* of Mathurā. All those who come from other far-off places to perform Mathurā *parikramā* and to have *darśana* of her pastime-places become free from all kinds of sins. Not only that, if one simply takes a vow to reside in Mathurā, he becomes free from all kinds of entanglements.

It is stated in the *Padma Purāṇa* that if one desires to have *darśana* of Mathurā, but leaves his body before having had the opportunity to do so, he definitely takes birth in Mathurā.⁵ There is not the slightest doubt about this. Only those who have firm, unshakeable devotion for Śrī Kṛṣṇa and who are the objects of Śrī Kṛṣṇa’s abundant mercy can have attachment to this Mathurā Purī, which is beyond the material world.⁶

It is mentioned in the *Vāyu Purāṇa* that Mathurā Maṇḍala is within the eighty-four *kosas* of Braja Maṇḍala, and that Bhagavān Śrī Hari Himself eternally resides here.⁷ The *Vāyu Purāṇa* further states:

*aho madhupurī dhanyā vaikunṭhācca garīyasī
dinamekaṁ nivāsena harau bhakti prajāyate
trirātramapi ye tatra vasanti manujāmune
harir dṛśyati sukhaṁ teṣāṁ muktānāpi durlabham*

“Aho! This Mathurā Dhāma is even superior to and more blessed than Vaikuṇṭha, the *dhāma* of Śrī Nārāyaṇa. By residing here for only one day one attains *śrī hari-bhakti* and by residing here three nights, one attains that most rare *bhagavat-prema*, which is rare even for great liberated souls (*mukta mahā-puruṣas*).”

Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī has stated in *Śrī Mathurā-Māhātmya*:

*adyāvanti patad grahaṁ kuru kare māye śanairvījaya
chatra kāṣci grhāṇa kāśi purataḥ pādūyugaṁ dhāraya
nāyodhye bhaja sambhraṁ stutikathāṁ nodagāraya dvārake
devīm̐ya bhavatīṣu hanta mathurā dṛṣṭiprasādaṁ dadhe*

“O Avanti! Become ready with a spittoon in your hands. O Māyāpurī (Haridvāra)! Become ready to fan with a *cāmara*. O Kāṣci! Take an umbrella in your hand. O Kāśi! Hold wooden sandals in your hands and be ready. O Ayodhyā! Do not be afraid any more. O Dvārake! Do not chant any prayers.

This Mathurā-devī, who has become the chief queen of the king of kings, Mahārājādhirāja Śrī Kṛṣṇa, is pleased with all of you maidservants.”
 Śrī Kṛṣṇa’s Birthplace

(Śrī Kṛṣṇa Janma-sthāna)

About 5,200 years ago, at the end of the last Dvāpara-yuga, Svayaṁ Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇacandrajī appeared as the son of Śrī Vasudevajī and Devakī in the prison house of the extremely cruel Kāṁsa. At that time, Vasudeva and Devakī saw Him in His four-handed form. Both of them began praying to Him, seeing the child’s divinely wonderful form, with a complexion like that of a dark rain cloud. He was holding a conchshell, disc, club and lotus-flower in His four hands, and the mark of Śrīvatsa was on His chest and the Kaustubha jewel around His neck. In response to their prayers, Bhagavān assumed the form of a baby, and by His desire Vasudevajī picked up the newborn baby in his arms and left for Gokula-Mahāvana to leave the child in Nanda Bhavan. Vasudeva’s handcuffs and foot-shackles loosened and, as he was leaving the prison, the iron doors automatically opened and the guards fell asleep. It started raining, and the entire path cleared. Vasudevajī crossed the Yamunā, which was filled with roaring waves, and reached Nanda Bhavan in Gokula.

In Nanda Bhavan, two-handed Śyāmasundara was born from Yaśodājī’s womb, followed some moments later by a girl (Yogamāyā). Yaśodā was not fully conscious due to the labour of child birth. As soon as Vasudevajī entered the house, two-handed Kṛṣṇa assimilated the son of Vasudeva within Himself. Vasudevajī was unable to understand that this mysterious event had occurred. He picked up the girl in his arms and silently returned to Kāṁsa’s prison. The iron doors of the prison automatically closed again behind him and he and Devakī became chained by the handcuffs and the foot-shackles once more. That night Kāṁsa received word that a child had been born to Vasudeva and Devakī. In a maddened state, he went to the prison with sword in hand, snatched the baby girl from the hands of his sister Devakī, and tried to kill her by holding her legs and dashing her onto a stone platform. However, the girl at once assumed the form of eight-handed Durgā and disappeared into the sky after rebuking Kāṁsa.

Śrī Vajranābhajī, the great grandson of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, established an extensive temple at Śrī Kṛṣṇa’s birthplace. Over the centuries, the religious kings of India successively built large temples on the same location. When Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu arrived in Braja, there was a large temple there. Seeing Śrīman Mahāprabhu’s sweet dancing, which was filled with *bhāva*, and hearing His sweet *kīrtana*, hundreds and thousands of people assembled there and became overwhelmed with ecstasy.

At this place, Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu saved Subuddhi Rāya, the king of Bengal, by stopping him from committing suicide. He then made him into a great devotee. Bengal’s fanatic Muslim ruler had forcibly ostracised Subuddhi Rāya from his Hindu caste. Subuddhi Rāya wanted to become a

Hindu again, but, according to the rigid rules of the dog-matic Hindu priests and legislators of that time, there was no path by which he could re-enter Hinduism before his death. However, Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu, the ocean of mercy, asked him to utter *śrī-kṛṣṇa-nāma* just once, and Subuddhi Rāya was thereby purified. Śrīman Mahāprabhu then made Subuddhi Rāya's life successful by instructing him to perform *harināma-saṅkīrtana* and Vaiṣṇava *sevā* for the rest of his days.

Śrīman Mahāprabhu arrived in Braja during the rule of the Mughal emperor Humāyūn. The Muslims later destroyed the temple that was there at the time. In 1610 A.D., the king of Orchā, Mahārāja Vīrasingh Deva, constructed an extensive temple of Ādikeśava at the cost of thirty-three hundred thousand *rupees*; but in 1669 A.D. the intolerant and fanatic Muslim ruler Aurangzeb destroyed it and changed its external form to convert it into a mosque. The priests of Śrī Ādikeśavajī hid the ancient deity in Rājadhāna, a village situated seventeen miles from the present city of Īṭāvā, in the district of Kānpura.

Even today, this same *vigraha* resides in a very small temple in Rājadhāna, although the *vijaya vigraha* continues to be worshipped today in the Ādikeśava Mandira in Mallapurā behind the present Janma-sthāna. The speciality of this *vigraha* is that it is decorated with the twenty-four *avatāras* of Bhagavān. In other words, the marks of the twenty-four *avatāras* are seen on the body of the deity. Vaiṣṇava *bhaktas* used to visit this temple to take *darśana* of this Ādikeśava deity. Today, a very big temple has been constructed through the funds raised by Śrī Madanamohana Mālaviya at the old birthplace of Śrī Kṛṣṇa at Keśava Kaṭara, by the desire of the late Śrī Hanumān Prasāda Poddārajī of Gītā Press in Go-rakhapura, and by the efforts of Śrī Dālmīyājī and other wealthy persons.

The *janma-bhūmi* (birthplace) of Śrī Kṛṣṇa is situated in the Mallapurā area of Mathurā. Cāṇura and the other wrestlers (*mallas*) of Mahārāja Kaṁsa used to live nearby. There is a very large *kuṇḍa* close by named Potrā. Previously, Potrā Kuṇḍa lay within the premises of Kaṁsa's prison house, and Śrī Vasudeva and Devakījī used to wash their clothes and take bath in it. It is said that Devakījī's clothes were washed here after the delivery of her sons. The name of this *kuṇḍa* used to be Pavitrā Kuṇḍa, but later, due to degeneration of the word *pavitrā*, it became known as Potrā Kuṇḍa.

Viśrāma Ghāṭa (Viśrānti Tīrtha)

The famous Viśrāma Ghāṭa is the principal *ghāṭa* of Mathurā. According to the *Saura Purāṇa*, this *tīrtha* is named Viśrānti Tīrtha for the following reasons:

*tato viśrānti tīrthākhyam
tīrthamaho vināśanam
saṁsāra maru saścāra
kleśa viśrāntidaṁ nṛṇām*

“Wandering throughout the desert of material existence, the *jīvas* suffer the threefold miseries of life. They are without shelter in all respects, and become thoroughly exhausted by many kinds of afflictions. When such *jīvas* take bath in the waters of this great *tīrtha*, which have bathed Śrī Kṛṣṇa’s lotus feet, they experience tranquility (*viśrāma*). Therefore, the name of this great *tīrtha* is Viśrānti or Viśrāma Ghāṭa.”

It is said that after killing the greatly powerful Kaṁsa, Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa had Kaṁsa’s funeral rites performed at Dhruva Ghāṭa, after which He and His relatives and friends took bath at this holy *ghāṭa*. He then took rest here. Śrī Kṛṣṇa may need to rest in His *nara-līlā* (human-like pas-times), but *sac-cid-ānanda* Svayaṁ Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa, who is full of all six opulences and endowed with all *śaktis* that can make the impossible possible (*aghaṭana-ghaṭana-paṭīyasī*), never needs any rest. However, this *ghāṭa* is certainly a place of rest (*viśrāma*) for the distressed *jīvas* who have strayed from Bhagavān and are immersed in the endless and bottomless ocean of birth and death.

Every year, before starting Braja Maṇḍala Parikramā, hundreds and thousands of devout people take bath, perform *ācamana* and then take *saṅkalpa* (a vow) here at this great *tīrtha*. They also return to this place upon completing their *parikramā*.

On the day of Yama-dvitiyā (or Bhaiyādūja), which is the second day after Amāvasyā in the month of Kārtika, many faithful and pious people from far-off places take bath at this place. According to the *Purāṇas*, Yama (Dharmarāja) and Yamunā (Yamī) are twins. Yamunājī’s heart is very soft. Unable to tolerate seeing the various sufferings of the *jīvas*, she invited her brother on her birthday and satisfied him by feeding him many kinds of delicious food preparations and sweets. Yama became pleased and told her to ask for a boon. Yamunājī said, “If anyone bathes in my waters with faith on this day, please relieve him from the clutches of birth and death and from the various threefold miseries.”

Hearing this, Yama Mahārāja replied, “So be it!”

Although it is very glorious to bathe anywhere in Śrī Yamunā, it is especially glorious to do so in Braja, and even more so at Viśrāma Ghāṭa on the day of Yama-dvitiyā. In particular, *lākhs* of brothers and sisters will come to take bath at Viśrāma Ghāṭa on this day of the year.

The Yamunā’s Twenty-four Ghāṭas

In Mathurā, Śrī Yamunā flows in a crescent shape. Viśrāma Ghāṭa is situated in the centre. On her southern side lie the following twelve *ghāṭas*: (1) Avimukta Tīrtha, (2) Guhya Tīrtha, (3) Prayāga Tīrtha, (4) Kankhala Tīrtha, (5) Tinduka Tīrtha, (6) Sūrya Tīrtha, (7) Baṭa Svāmī Tīrtha, (8) Dhruva Tīrtha, (9) Ṛṣi Tīrtha, (10) Mokṣa Tīrtha, (11) Koṭi Tīrtha and (12) Bodhi Tīrtha. The following twelve *ghāṭas* lie on her northern side: (13) Nava Tīrtha (Asī Tīrtha), (14) Saṁyamana Tīrtha, (15) Dhārāpattana Tīrtha, (16) Nāga Tīrtha, (17) Ghaṇṭā-Bharaṇaka Tīrtha, (18) Brahma Tīrtha, (19) Soma Tīrtha, (20)

Sarasvatī-Patana Tīrtha, (21) Cakra Tīrtha, (22) Dasāśvamedha Tīrtha, (23) Vighnarāja Tīrtha and (24) Koṭī Tīrtha.

All the principal *tīrthas* of India, even Tīrtharāja Prayāga, worship Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa on the banks of Śrī Yamunā Mahārānī, and do so under her shelter. Especially during Cāturmāsya, these *tīrthas* all come here to perform their worship.

1. Avimukta Tīrtha

Here, Kāśī Viśvanātha Mahādeva himself performs *ārādhana* of Bhagavān. Those who take bath in this *tīrtha* or who leave their body here very easily become free from material existence and reach the *dhāma* of Bhagavān.⁸

2. Guhya Tīrtha

By taking bath here one is liberated from the cycle of birth and death and attains *bhagavat-loka*, the planet of Bhagavān.⁹

3. Prayāga Tīrtha

Tīrtharāja Prayāga, the king of the *tīrthas*, worships Bhagavān here. Venī Mādhava of Prayāga is eternally present at this place. Those who take bath here receive the result of performing all the *yajñas* headed by the *agniṣṭoma-yajña* and attain Vaikuṇṭha Dhāma.¹⁰

4. Kankhala Tīrtha

Mahādeva and Pārvatī are always devotedly worshipping Śrī Hari at this *tīrtha*. Just as Mahādeva Śaṅkara bestowed mercy upon Prajāpati Dakṣa and liberated him from material existence, so one who bathes at this *tīrtha* will attain Brahma-loka.¹¹

5. Tinduka Tīrtha

This *tīrtha* is also named Guhya Tīrtha. By taking bath here one attains *bhagavad dhāma*, the abode of Bhagavān.¹² Nearby is Daṇḍī Ghāṭa, where Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu took bath and captivated everyone by His dancing and *saṅkīrtana*. Nowadays, this *ghāṭa* is also called Bengālī Ghāṭa.

6. Sūrya Tīrtha

Mahārāja Bali, the son of Virocana, worshipped Sūryadeva here and was granted his desired result, because Sūryadeva, together with his twelve different aspects (*dvādaśa kalā*), is always absorbed here in the worship of His *ārādhya*deva Śrī Kṛṣṇa. By bathing at this place on Sunday, during *saṅkrānti* or at the time of a solar or lunar eclipse, one achieves the result of performing a *rājasūya-yajña* and after liberation attains the abode of Bhagavān.¹³

Nearby is Bali Mahārāja Tīlā. A deity of Bali Mahārāja and his own worshipable deity Śrī Vāmanadevajī reside in the temple there.

7. Baṭasvāmī Tīrtha

Here Sūryadeva worships Bhagavān Nārāyaṇa. Another name for Sūryadeva is Baṭasvāmī. By taking bath here with faith on Sundays, a person becomes healthy and wealthy and at the end of life attains *parama gati*, the supreme destination.¹⁴

8. Dhruva Tīrtha

After being pierced by the arrow-like words of his step-mother, the five-year-old Dhruva came to the forest here on the instruction of his mother Sunītijī and met Devarṣi Nārada at this *ghāṭa* on the bank of the Yamunā. Devarṣi Nārada instructed Dhruva to take bath at this *ghāṭa* and then gave him a twelve-syllable *mantra*. Dhruva thereafter journeyed to the isolated highlands of Madhuvana where he worshipped Bhagavān by performing severe austerities and finally received His *darśana*.

By taking bath here, a person is glorified on Dhruva-loka. Also, one's forefathers become happy when one offers them *śrāddha* here, which grants the equivalent result of offering *piṇḍa* in Gayā.¹⁵ Many *mahātmās* following the *guru-paramparā* of the ancient Nimbāditya Sampradāya have been living here, and this is the only place of this ancient *sampradāya* that remains in Braja Maṇḍala.

9. Ṛṣi Tīrtha

Here Nara-Nārāyaṇa Ṛṣi of Badrī Dhāma is always absorbed in the worship of Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa. This *tīrtha* is situated south of Dhruva Tīrtha. A person who takes bath here attains *bhagavat-loka*.¹⁶

10. Mokṣa Tīrtha

All the *tīrthas* of South India, such as Madurāī Tīrtha and Kanyā Kumārī, worship Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa at this *ghāṭa* in Mathurā Purī. One who takes bath at Mokṣa Tīrtha easily attains *mokṣa* in the form of service to the lotus feet of Viṣṇu.¹⁷

11. Koṭi Tīrtha

Millions and millions of demigods desire to worship Bhagavān here. It is rare even for the demigods to be able to enter this place. One attains *bhagavat-loka* by taking bath at Koṭi Tīrtha.¹⁸

12. Bodhi Tīrtha

Here Bhagavān Buddha gives the right understanding (*bodha*) of the *jīva's svarūpa dharma*, namely, *bhagavad-bhakti*. Therefore, this place is called Bodhi Tīrtha.¹⁹

It is said that Rāvaṇa secretly performed austerities here. He was a *nirviśeṣa brahma-jṣānī ṛṣi* in Tretā-yuga. In his *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra*, he introduced his *nirviśeṣa brahma-jṣāna* or *bauddhavāda* (Buddhism). Being a *brahmavādī* and *niḥśaktik*, he wanted to kidnap the wife of Bhagavān Śrī Rāmacandrajī, Śrī Sītā-devī. In other words, he wanted to possess the *śakti* of *sarva-śaktimāna*. But Śrī Rāmacandrajī killed this *nirveśeṣa brahmavādī* together with his dynasty. Simply by taking bath at Bodhi Tīrtha, one very easily delivers his forefathers and can himself proceed to Pitṛ-loka, the planet of the forefathers. Fortunate *jīvas* reach *bhagavad-dhāma* by bathing here in the Yamunā.

13. Nava Tīrtha

The twelve *ghāṭas* that follow (numbered 13 to 24) lie south of Viśrāma Ghāṭa. Nava Tīrtha is situated north of the famous Asi Kuṇḍa, or Askunḍa Ghāṭa, which lies near Viśrama Ghāṭa. Anyone who takes bath in Asi Kuṇḍa has all of his sins destroyed, whether he committed these sins by body, mind or words. Taking bath at Nava Tīrtha develops one's *bhakti* to newer and higher forms. There is no *tīrtha* greater than this one, nor will there ever be.²⁰

14. Saṁyamana Tīrtha

The present name of this *tīrtha* is Svāmī Ghāṭa. Some say that Mahārāja Vasudeva crossed the Yamunā from here, carrying the newborn baby Kṛṣṇa in his arms. One who takes bath here attains the abode of Bhagavān.²¹

15. Dhārāpatana Tīrtha

A person who takes bath at Dhārāpatana Tīrtha enjoys all kinds of pleasures and is easily elevated to Svarga. One who leaves his body here goes to the *dhāma* of Bhagavān.²²

16. Nāga Tīrtha

This *tīrtha* is the best among the best of *tīrthas*. By taking bath here, one does not return to the material world.²³ Bhagavān Śeṣa (Ananta Deva) is always present here to protect the *dhāma*. When Śrī Vasudeva Mahārāja carried the newborn baby Kṛṣṇa across the Yamunā, the pouring rain drenched him. Ananta Deva shielded them both from the rain at this place by spreading His unlimited hoods like an umbrella.

17. Ghaṇṭābharaṇaka Tīrtha

One who bathes at this *tīrtha* is relieved from all kinds of sins and proceeds to Sūrya-loka.²⁴

18. Brahma Tīrtha

Brahmā, the grandsire of the universe, is present at this *ghāṭa* of the Yamunā and worships Bhagavān here. By taking bath, performing *ācamana*, drinking the Yamunā water and residing here, a person advances to Viṣṇuloka under the auspices of Brahmājī. This place is called Brahma Tīrtha because of its connection with Brahmājī.²⁵

19. Soma Tīrtha

The other name of this *tīrtha* is Gau Ghāṭa. A person who sprinkles himself with the pure water of the Yamunā at Soma Tīrtha will have all his cherished desires fulfilled.²⁶

20. Sarasvatī-Patana Tīrtha

This *tīrtha* lies nearby Gau Ghāṭa (or Soma Tīrtha), to the left. The river Sarasvatī used to meet the Yamunā at this place. Another name of the Sarasvatī is Śrī Kṛṣṇa Gaṅgā; this *tīrtha* is therefore also known as Kṛṣṇa Gaṅgā Ghāṭa.

This *ghāṭa* is related to Śrī Kṛṣṇa-Dvaipāyana Veda-vyāsa, who took birth from Matsyagandhā Sarasvatī and Maharṣi Pārāśara on an island in the Yamunā near here. It is said that Śrī Vyāsadeva composed the *paramahansa saṁhitā*, *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, here by seeing *pūrṇa-brahma* Śrī Kṛṣṇa and all the pastimes of Śrī Kṛṣṇa in Braja, Mathurā and Dvārakā through *bhakti-yoga*, after having heard the instructions of Devarṣi Nārada. This is correct. How else could he have had *darśana* of Śrī Kṛṣṇa and described the sweetest of His sweetest pastimes without performing *ārādhana* in Braja Dhāma, the sweetest of all *dhāmas*? This is also the opinion of those learned devotees who can extract the essence of *śāstra*. One who takes bath here is relieved from all kinds of sins and attains *bhagavad prema*. Even people of low castes become *paramahansas*, or in other words *parama bhaktas*, by bathing here.²⁷

21. Cakra Tīrtha

This *tīrtha*, situated on the bank of the Yamunā, is famous throughout all Mathurā Maṇḍala. Nearby is Mahārāja Ambarīṣa's Ṭīlā, where he resided and worshipped Bhagavān with all the limbs of *śuddha bhakti*. The behaviour of Maharṣi Durvāsā towards *rājā* Ambarīṣa displeased the *cakra* of Viṣṇu, who at the time of the Dvādaśī *pāraṇa* (the moment on Dvādaśī that is auspicious for breaking the fast) chased Durvāsā throughout the universe. For one year Durvāsā fled, running up even to Brahmāloka, Śivaloka and Vaikuṇṭhaloka, but the *cakra* was relentless in its pursuit. Finally, on the advice of Bhagavān

Viṣṇu, Durvāsā returned to *bhakta* Ambarīṣa and offered him prayers. It was by these prayers that the *cakra* stopped at this place and the *ṛṣi*'s life was spared. One who takes bath here is liberated from sins, including even the sin of killing a *brāhmaṇa*. He obtains *darśana* of Bhagavān by the mercy of Sudarśana Cakra, and his life thus becomes successful.²⁸

22. Daśāśvamedha Tīrtha

Brahmājī performed ten *aśvamedha-yajñas* at this sacred *ghāṭa* on the Yamunā. Devarṣi Nārada, the four Kumāras and other *ṛṣis* always worship this place. Anyone who bathes at Daśāśvamedha Tīrtha attains *bhagavad-dhāma*.²⁹

23. Vighnarāja Tīrtha

By bathing at Vighnarāja Tīrtha, a person is liberated from all kinds of obstacles (*vighna*). Śrī Gaṇeśajī, who removes all varieties of obstacles, always resides here and worships Bhagavān. By the mercy of Bhagavān Nṛsimhadeva especially, all impediments to *bhakti* are removed for one who takes bath at this *tīrtha*, and he is sent to the *dhāma* of Bhagavān.³⁰

24. Koṭi Tīrtha

By bathing here, a person gets the result of donating millions and millions (*koṭi-koṭi*) of cows.³¹ Nearby lies Gokarṇa Tīrtha. The well-known Gokarṇa released his brother Dhuṇḍhukārī from the life of a ghost by reciting *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* to him. Gokarṇa Tīrtha is this same Gokarṇa's place of worship.³²

Places Along the Mathurā Parikramā Path

Apart from the twenty-four *ghāṭas* just described, there are numerous other places of interest on the *paśca-kosī* (ten-mile) *parikramā* of Mathurā. Having started the *parikramā* at Viśrāma Ghāṭa, the first place one comes to is Pīpaleśvara Mahādeva.

Pīpaleśvara Mahādeva

Situated near Viśrāma Ghāṭa, on the eastern side of Mathurā Purī, Pīpaleśvara Mahādeva always protects Mathurā Kṣetra. He is one of Mathurā's four *kṣetra-pālas* (area-protectors). Thereafter, one can have *darśana* of Veṇī Mādhava, Rāmeśvara, Dāūjī, Madana-Mohana, Tinduka Tīrtha, Sūrya Ghāṭa and Dhruva Ṭilā. Then, on Sapta-ṛṣi Ṭilā one can have the sacred *darśana* of Atri, Marīci, Kratu, Aṅgīrā, Gautama, Vaśiṣṭha and Pulastya Ṛṣi. These seven (*sapta*) *ṛṣis* reside in Mathurā Dhāma at this place, performing their worship of Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

Bali Mahārāja Ṭilā

Here one can have *darśana* of Bali Mahārāja and Vāmanadevajī. King Bali worshipped Bhagavān Vāmanadeva at this place.

Akrūra Bhavan

A little further on lies the residence of Akrūrajī. He wanted to bring Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma to his residence, but They stayed with Their father, Śrī Nanda Bābā, on the outskirts of Mathurā and promised to come to Akrūra after killing Kaṁsa.

Kubjā Kūpa (the well of Kubjā)

While wandering throughout Mathurā, Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma met Kubjā, the maidservant of Kaṁsa, at this place. With great love Kubjā offered *āṅgarāga* (an application of ointments) to the limbs of Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma. Just by touching her waist and chin with His hands, Śrī Kṛṣṇa transformed her into a very beautiful young *kīśorī* with the appearance of an *apsarā*. Looking at Him with shy, lust-filled eyes, Kubjā tried to take Him to her home, but Śrī Kṛṣṇa left after promising to visit her house upon completing His work. After killing Kaṁsa, Kṛṣṇa went to Kubjā's house with Uddhavajī and stayed there for some time, thus fulfilling her heart's desire.

Raṅgabhūmi and Śrī Raṅgeśvara Mahādeva

In the southern part of Mathurā, Śrī Rāṅgeśvarajī is the *kṣetra-pāla*. Mahārāja Kaṁsa, the destroyer of his family, the Bhoja Dynasty, conspired to kill Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma. He therefore had a *raṅgaśālā* (wrestling arena) built here. Through cunning means, Akrūra brought Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Baladeva from Śrī Nanda-Gokula. On the pretext of sight-seeing, Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Baladeva reached this *raṅgaśālā* with the cowherd boys, after asking various people for directions. The *raṅgaśālā* was very beautifully decorated. Splendid arched gateways were bedecked with flowers, and the huge bow of Śaṅkara was placed at the front in the *raṅgaśālā*. The mad elephant, Kuvalyāpīḍa, who was trained to kill the two brothers, blocked the main entrance, waiting to receive a signal to kill Them. The splendour of Raṅgeśvara Mahādeva, who had been decorated in different ways, was also awesome. Many gigantic and fierce wrestlers, such as Cāṇūra, Muṣṭika, Śala and Tośala were ready for the wrestling match inside the arena. Mahārāja Kaṁsa, together with his friends and prominent citizens, were seated on a high platform.

Upon entering the arena, Śrī Kṛṣṇa effortlessly picked up the bow with His left hand. In front of everyone, He strung the bow within a moment and pulled the string in such a way that the bow broke into pieces, making a thunderous sound. Both brothers easily killed all the soldiers who were protecting the bow. After slaying Kuvalyāpīḍa, Śrī Kṛṣṇa pulled out the elephant's two tusks and used them to kill the elephant-keeper and many other wicked persons. Some soldiers ran to Mahārāja Kaṁsa to tell him about the incident. Grinding his teeth in anger, Kaṁsa signaled to Cāṇūra and Muṣṭika to quickly kill the two boys. Just then, Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Baladeva,

smiling like two lion-cubs, reached the wrestling arena, carrying the huge elephant-tusks on Their shoulders, Their bodies sprinkled with blood. Cāṇūra and Muṣṭika challenged the two brothers to wrestle, through various gestures, like flexing their muscles to display their power and strength. Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the propagator of decent conduct, suggested that He and Balarāmajī fight with wrestlers of Their own age; but to entertain Mahārāja Kaṁsa, Cāṇūra arrogantly challenged Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Muṣṭika challenged Balarāmajī. This is what Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma in fact wanted, and thus the fight began. Considering this wrestling match to be immoral and improper, the women of the city stood up and prepared to leave. Beholding the sweetness of Śrī Kṛṣṇa's form, they said, "Oh! In truth, only Brajabhūmi, the land of Vṛndāvana, is supremely sacred and blessed. Parama Puruṣottama resides there, disguised as an ordinary human being. That Prabhu, whose lotus feet are worshipped by the god of gods Mahādeva Śaṅkara and by Lakṣmījī, wanders about there in great bliss, wearing a many-coloured garland of flowers, playing His flute and performing various pastimes with Balarāmajī and His *sakhās* while tending the cows. This sweetness of Śrī Kṛṣṇa's form is easily available only to the residents of Vṛndāvana, especially the *gopīs*. The peacocks, *śukas* (male parrots), *sārīs* (female parrots), cows, calves and rivers of Braja are all blessed. They are satisfied by freely relishing the varieties of Kṛṣṇa's sweetness."

As the women of Mathurā were discussing this, Śrī Kṛṣṇa defeated Cāṇūra and Balarāmajī defeated Muṣṭika, killing them. Thereafter, the two brothers also killed Kūṭa, Śala, Tośala and the other wrestlers. Kaṁsa became furious and ordered that Śrī Kṛṣṇa, Baladeva, Nanda and Vasudeva be taken prisoners. However, in a moment and with great speed, Śrī Kṛṣṇa leapt onto the platform where Kaṁsa was sitting, and catching hold of his *śikhā*, threw him to the ground. Kṛṣṇa then jumped on his chest, causing his life-air to leave him like a bird flying away. Kaṁsa was thus effortlessly killed. Śrī Kṛṣṇa wonderfully slew Kaṁsa and his associates in the *raṅgaśālā*. Seeing this spectacle (*raṅga*), Śaṅkarajī, whom Kaṁsa had worshipped, became very happy. Hence, his name became Śrī Raṅgeśvara. To this day, Raṅgabhūmi glorifies this colourful pastime of Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

According to *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* and Śrīla Viśvanātha Cakravartīpāda, Kaṁsa was killed on the day of Śiva-rātri. Since Kaṁsa had called Akrūra to his home for advice on the night of Ekādaśī, Akrūra had reached Nanda Bhavan on Dvādaśī, and on Trayodaśī Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma had travelled from Nandagaon to Mathurā in Akrūra's chariot. That evening, They wandered around the city of Mathurā and the *dhanuṣa-yajña* (bow sacrifice) was performed. The next day, in other words on, Śiva Caturdaśī, the two brothers killed Kuvalayāpīḍa, Cāṇūra, Muṣṭika and Kaṁsa.

Every year in the month of Kārtika on Śuklā-daśamī, one day before Devotthāna Ekādaśī, the Caube community organises a festival in memory of the killing of Kaṁsa, in which a twenty-five to thirty foot tall *mūrti* of Kaṁsa is built to be killed by Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

Śrī Keśavajī Gauḍīya Maṭha

This *maṭha* is situated adjacent to Śrī Raṅgeśvara Mahādeva and Kaṁsa Ṭilā, on the right side of the *parikramā* path and on the left side of the Mathurā-Āgrā road. It is currently a well-known place of *darśana*. Ācārya keśarī om viṣṇupāda Śrī Śrīmad Bhakti Prajñāna Keśava Gosvāmī Mahārāja named this *maṭha* 'Śrī Keśavajī Gauḍīya Maṭha' after the presiding deity of Mathurā, Bhagavān Śrī Keśavajī. From its inauguration, the author was appointed *maṭha-rakṣaka* (superintendent), in order to propagate *śuddha-bhakti* as practised and preached by Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu to the Hindi-speaking areas of India. In a very short time, many books were published from here in Hindi, the national language of India, like *Jaiva-dharma*, *Śrī Śikṣāṣṭaka*, *Śrīman Mahāprabhu kī Śikṣā*, *Upadeśāmṛta*, *Śrī Manaḥ Śikṣā*, *Śrīmad Bhagavad-gītā* and the monthly magazine *Śrī Bhāgavata-patrikā*. New books about *bhakti* continue to be published to this day. Śrī Abhaycaraṇa Bhaktivedāntajī, who created an uproar in the western world through *śrī-harināma-saṅkīrtana* as preached by Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu and who extensively published and distributed *Śrīmad Bhagavad-gītā*, *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* and many other books in many languages of the world, accepted *tridaṇḍa sannyāsa* at this place from om viṣṇupāda Śrī Śrīmad Bhakti Prajñāna Keśava Gosvāmī Mahārāja. He accepted the *sannyāsa* name and title of *tridaṇḍi-svāmī* Śrī Śrīmad Bhaktivedānta Svāmī Mahārāja at that time. The author was the priest at this ceremony.

After taking *darśana* of this *maṭha*, one can have the *darśana* of Śiva-tāla and Kaṅkālī-devī.

Kaṅkālī

The *mandira* of Kaṅkālī-devī is found on Kaṅkālī Ṭilā. Because Kaṁsa worshipped her, she is called Kaṁsa Kālī or Kaṅkālī. This is the same eight-armed Durgā-devī who rides a lion. Kaṁsa wanted to kill her, thinking her to be the daughter of Devakī, but Devī escaped from his hands and ascended into the sky.

Proceeding from here, we find Balabhadra Kuṇḍa. On the banks of this *kuṇḍa* lie the temples of Dāūjī and Jagannāthajī. We then arrive at the temple of Bhūteśvara Mahādeva.

Bhūteśvara Mahādeva

The eternal *kṣetra-pāla* on Mathurā's western side is Bhūteśvara Mahādeva. Nearby is Pātāla-devī, whom Kaṁsa worshipped, and a little further on are Potrā Kuṇḍa, Ādī Keśava and Śrī Kṛṣṇa Janma-sthāna, which have already been described. We then reach Jṣāna-vāpī, or Jṣāna-bāvaḍī.

Jṣāna-vāpī (Jṣāna-bāvaḍī)

This important ancient *tīrtha* is hidden within the earth on the Mathurā *paśca-kosī parikramā* path between Bhūteśvara Mahādeva and Kaṭarā

Keśavadeva (the birthplace of Śrī Kṛṣṇa). Referring to this *tīrtha*, the *Varāha Purāṇa* (*Mathurā Mahātmya*, *adhyāya* 269-42) states:

*yo vāpyāṁ dharmarājasya / mathurāyāstu paścimai
sthānaṁ karoti tasyāṁ tu / grahadorṣarna lipyate*

“All the evil planetary influences of those persons who bathe in Īśavāpī Bāvaḍī of Dharmarāja, situated in western Mathurā, are removed and they attain *bhagavat-bhakti*.” In his *Mathurā Parikramā* (*vikramī* 2500), *kavivara* Harilālā Kakora says:

*satyug kau ik tīrath kahau / vāpī jṣān-bhakti koṇ lahoṇ
yāmai joṇ snān karaijū / dhoī pāp bahu puny bharañjū*

“There is a *tīrtha* from Satya-yuga in the form of a well that is filled with *jṣāna* and *bhakti*. Those who bathe in this well wash away all their sins and receive thousands and thou-sands of pious credits.”

According to the *Vāyu Purāṇa*, Dharmarāja Yudhiṣṭhira built this *bāvaḍī*, or deep tank with steps. This place is also important as the place where Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa used to consult with Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira.

Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta specifically describes the arrival in this same Śrīdhāma Mathurā of Śacīnandana Gaurahari, who is non-different from Śrī Kṛṣṇa and who preached *śuddha-bhakti* and *kṛṣṇa-nāma-saṅkīrtana* throughout the whole world. He took bath in the Yamunā at Viśrāma Ghāṭa and then went to the temple of Śrī Keśavadeva. Seeing Him performing *kīrtana* and dancing in ecstasy, a crowd of thousands assembled there. Caitanya Mahāprabhu took bath and did *ācamana* in Jṣāna-bāvaḍī. *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta* mentions that He later stayed at the house of a Vaiṣṇava *brāhmaṇa* from the Sanodiyā community who lived near Jṣāna-bāvaḍī, where he accepted *prasāda*.

The *Purāṇas* mention that this place is related to Bhārṭṛ-hari Rājā. The *samādhi* of this *rājā* is also located here, but has now fallen into ruins.

Mahāvidyā-devī (Ambikā-devī)

Once, Mahārāja Nanda, Kṛṣṇa, Baladeva, Yaśodā-devī and other *gopas* came to this Ambikāvana on pilgrimage. They bathed in the sacred water of the Sarasvatī River and worshipped Paśupati (Gokaṇṇa Mahādeva). They remained there overnight. During the night, a huge python caught Nanda Bābā and slowly began to swallow him. Everyone tried to save Nanda Bābā, but to no avail. Nanda Bābā cried out to Kṛṣṇa in great distress, and something wonderful took place – Kṛṣṇa touched the python with His feet, and he at once gave up his huge snake body and assumed the form of a beautiful *vidyādhara* (celestial being). The *vidyādhara* stood up and offered obeisances to Śrī Kṛṣṇa. On Kṛṣṇa’s inquiry, he revealed his identity. “I was a *vidyādhara* named Sudarśana,” he said. “Once, while flying in an airplane, I saw some ugly *ṛṣis* in the lineage of Aṅgīrā Muni and made fun of them. They cursed me to become a snake. Today that curse has proven to be a benediction, because the touch of Your lotus feet has not only freed me from

the curse, but has also made my life successful.” This place is famous by the name of Mahāvidyā-devī.

After this *tīrtha* comes Sarasvatī Kuṇḍa, Cāmuṇḍā-devī and Rajaka-badha Ṭilā.

Rajaka-badha (the killing of the washerman)

While roaming throughout the city of Mathurā, Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Baladevājī spotted a washerman here whose task was to wash and dye Kāṁsa’s clothes. Seeing the beautiful garments in his charge, Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma asked to have some that would be appropriate for Them to wear. However, the *rajaka* (washerman) made fun of Them and refused to hand over any clothes. Upon hearing his sarcastic remarks, Śrī Kṛṣṇa at once beheaded him with His bare hand in front of everyone, and granted him an appropriate kind of liberation.

Proceeding further, one reaches Gokarṇa Mahādeva.

Gokarṇa Mahādeva

Gokarṇa Mahādeva is the *kṣetra-pāla* of the *dhāma* on Mathurā’s northern side. He is called Gokarṇa Mahādeva because Gokarṇa, the famous speaker of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, worshipped him.

Continuing from here, on the banks of the Yamunā are Nīlakaṇṭheśvara Mahādeva and Ambarīṣa Ṭilā.

Ambarīṣa Ṭilā

On the right hand side, near the confluence of the Sarasvatī and Yamunā, is Ambarīṣa Ṭilā. In Satya-yuga, Mahārāja Ambarīṣa was the *cakravartī* emperor of this world consisting of seven islands. He was an *ekāntika bhakta* of Bhagavān and engaged all his senses in following the different *aṅgas* (limbs) of *bhakti*. With his mind, he would meditate upon the pastimes of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. With his voice, he would chant the names of Bhagavān and glorify His various pastimes. With his hands, he would clean the temple of Bhagavān. Through his ears, he would hear about the pastimes of Bhagavān. He would engage his eyes in taking *darśana* of Śrī Mukunda’s temples. He would engage his nose in smelling the garlands, sandalwood paste and other articles that had been offered at the lotus feet of Bhagavān. He would serve the *prasāda* offered to Bhagavān by tasting it with his tongue, and with his legs he would circumambulate Bhagavān’s *dhāma*, Tulasī, Bhagavān’s temples, and so on. He would also observe Ekādaśī and other fasts related to Hari.

Once, while residing at this place in Mathurā, Mahārāja Ambarīṣa observed the vow of Dvādaśī by *nirjala*, fasting without water. On the following day, there was only a short time after sunrise in which it was auspicious to break his fast (*pāraṇa*). Mahārāja Ambarīṣa performed *pūjā*, *arcana* and so on, but just as he was about to break his fast with grains offered to Bhagavān, Maharṣi Durvāsā arrived. With great respect, the king invited the *ṛṣi* to join

him in breaking the fast. The *maharṣi* said, “I accept your invitation, but I first need to go to the bank of the Yamunā to perform some of my daily duties, such as taking bath and finishing my daily ritualistic ceremonies. Please wait until I return.” Saying this, the *ṛṣi* went to the Yamunā. However, Durvāsājī’s return was slightly delayed, and the auspicious time for breaking the fast was about to pass. After consulting with the *brāhmaṇas* and his ministers, Mahārāja Ambarīṣa took a drop of Bhagavān’s *caraṇāmṛta* in order to protect his fast.

When Maharṣi Durvāsā returned, he was furious, knowing well that Mahārāja Ambarīṣa had broken the fast without him. He pulled out a *jaṭā* (dread-lock) from his head and transformed it into a *rākṣasī* made of fire called Kṛtyā, who was about to burn Ambarīṣa to ashes. However, Mahārāja Ambarīṣa remained standing there fearlessly with folded hands. At once, Sudarśana Cakra, the protector of the *bhaktas*, appeared and burnt Kṛtyā to ashes. Sudarśana Cakra then leapt towards Maharṣi Durvāsā, who swiftly ran in all directions to save his life. He fled to Bhuḥ, Bhuvah, Svaḥ and other planetary systems. He even went to Brahma-loka and Śiva-loka, but no one could save him. Wherever he went, he saw the frightening Sudarśana Cakra pursuing him. Finally, Maharṣi Durvāsā came to Nārāyaṇa in Vaikuṇṭha-loka and desperately cried out: “Help! Save me! Protect me!” Bhagavān Śrī Nārāyaṇa said, “I am under the control of My *bhaktas*. I am their heart and they are My heart. How can I foresake those who have taken My shelter, having left everything – their home, wife, sons, family, wealth and so forth? You should at once return to *bhakta* Ambarīṣa and plead for forgiveness. Sudarśana Cakra can be pacified by his prayer only, and not by any other means.”

For one full year, the great devotee Ambarīṣa Mahārāja remained standing there, waiting for Durvāsā and praying for his welfare. Upon returning from Vaikuṇṭha, the perturbed Durvāsā begged Mahārāja Ambarīṣa for his life. By offering various prayers, Ambarīṣajī pacified Sudarśana Cakra and then satisfied the *maharṣi* by respectfully offering him a variety of delicious foodstuffs. When Durvāsājī saw the glories of Mahārāja Ambarīṣa, he became very astonished. He said, “Oh! Today I have realised the unprecedented glories of the devotees of Bhagavān Anantadeva. Although I am such an *aparādhī*, Ambarīṣa Mahārāja always desires my welfare. This is only possible for the devotees of Bhagavān!”

This *līlā* took place here. To this day, Ambarīṣa Ṭīlā stands as witness to the glories of the devotee Ambarīṣa. Nearby, on the banks of the Yamunā, is Cakra Tīrtha, where Mahārāja Ambarīṣa pacified the *cakra* by offering various prayers.

Kaṁsa-kilā and other nearby tīrthas

After Sarasvatī-Patana Tīrtha (Kṛṣṇa Gaṅgā) and Soma Tīrtha (Gaṁ Ghāṭa), one comes to Kaṁsa-kilā, Ghaṇṭākarna and Mukti Tīrtha. Kaṁsa-kilā (the fort of Kaṁsa) was the residence or palace of Kaṁsa. The ruins that lie there today bear testimony to this. Between Kaṁsa-kilā and Vasudeva Ghāṭa (near

Svāmī Ghāṭa) are Brahma Ghāṭa, Vaikuṇṭha Ghāṭa and Dhārā-patana. Then, after Asī Kuṇḍa (Askunḍā Ghāṭa) and Maṇikarṇikā Ghāṭa is Viśrāma Ghāṭa, which completes the *paśca-kosī parikramā* of Mathurā.

Gatāśrama Nārāyaṇa Mandira & other nearby tīrthas

On Mathurā's inner *parikramā* path, south of Viśrāma Ghāṭa, is the temple of Gatāśrama Nārāyaṇa. Close to the present day Satiburja, in the right-hand side lane, stands the temple of Carcikā-devī. Near Raṅgeśvara Mandira, on the eastern side, lies Sapta-sāmudrī Kūpa, or the well of seven oceans. Then, under the railway line leading to the main railway station in Mathurā is Śiva-tāla. The road to Madhuvana also begins from there. Close to Bharatapura Gate lies the temple of Dīrgha Viṣṇu.

Dīrgha Viṣṇu

When Śrī Kṛṣṇa, Śrī Baladevajī and Their cowherd friends were proceeding to Kaṁsa's wrestling arena (*raṅgabhūmi*), Śrīdāma and other *sakhās* asked Him, “*Sakhe!* Are You going to *raṅgabhūmi*? How will You kill the mighty Kaṁsa with this small, tender body of Yours?” Śrī Kṛṣṇa then displayed His huge (*dīrgha*) form, carrying a conchshell, disk, club and lotus flower. Thus, the *sakhās* were convinced that their Kanhaiyā could do anything by the mercy of Nārāyaṇa, and that Nārāyaṇa sometimes manifested through Him. Happily, they danced towards the *raṅgaśālā* with Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

Mathurā-devī

Close to Dīrgha Viṣṇu, towards the east and inside a lane, is the temple of Mathurā-devī, the presiding deity (*adhiṣṭhātrī-devī*) of Mathurā. Mathurā-devī has a very loving relationship as a *sakhī* of Śrī Yamunājī. Together they serve their Prabhu, Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

Śrī Padmanābhajī

Heading east down the same lane, one comes to the temple of Bhagavān Śrī Padmanābha in Caubeyā Pāḍā. The father of the material creation, Brahmājī, took birth on the lotus flower that manifests from the lotus stem growing out of Garbhodaśāyī Bhagavān Padmanābha's navel. Only by Śrī Padmanābhajī's mercy does Vairāja Brahmājī create the material universe.

Ādi Varāha Mandira

Behind the present Dvārakādhīśa Mandira in Māṇika Choka are two temples of Varāhajī. One of them has a black deity of Varāha (Kṛṣṇa Varāha); the other has a white deity of Varāha (Śveta Varāha). During the period of Svāyambhuva Maṇu in Brāhmakalpa, Kṛṣṇa Varāha manifested from the nostril of Brahmājī in a four-legged, boar form. He kept the Earth on His tusk and brought her up from Rasātala, the nether region. During the reign of Cākṣusa Maṇu, Śveta Varāha manifested from the ocean. His face was like

that of a boar and the lower portion of His body was human-like. He is also called Nṛ Varāha. He killed Hiraṇyākśa and delivered the Earth.

At the beginning of Satya-yuga, there was a *brāhmaṇa ṛṣi* named Kapila. He was a worshipper of Bhagavān Ādi Varāha. Indra, the king of the demigods was pleased with that *brāhmaṇa* and brought that deity of Varāha to Svarga, where he installed Him for worship. Having defeated Indra, the mighty Rāvaṇa seized that Varāha deity from Svarga and established Him in Laṅkā. After killing the *nirviśeṣavādī* Rāvaṇa, Bhagavān Śrī Rāmacandra brought that same deity to Ayodhyā and installed Him in His palace. While leaving Ayodhyā to kill Lavaṇāsura, Mahārāja Śatrughna asked his elder brother Śrī Rāmacandrajī for this Varāha deity. Mahārāja Śatrughna carried the deity with him and, after killing Lavaṇāsura, established Him in the city of Mathurā, where one can take *darśana* of Him today.

Dvārakādīśa Mandira

Among the new temples of Mathurā, the Dvārakādīśa Mandira is prominent. It was established about 150 years ago by a devotee in the line of Śrī Vallabhācārya. This temple is situated close to Viśrāma Ghāṭa and Gatāśrama Ṭilā. The temples of Kṛṣṇa Varāha and Śveta Varāha are also nearby.

Dvārakādīśa is the king of Dvārakā, and thus Kṛṣṇa is here with His queens Rukmiṇī and Satyabhāmā. He is also without His peacock feather and flute. Generally, at the beginning of the rainy season, or the month of Śravaṇa, a very elaborate *jhūlana-yatra* (swing festival) takes place here. Hundreds and thousands of devotees, both inhabitants of Mathurā and devotees from very far away, assemble here to attend the festival. Dvārakādīśa is a wealthy personality, so He swings on a golden swing bedecked with jewels.

Once, the author went with a thousand devotees to the Dvārakādīśa Mandira. When he arrived, the temple door was closed. He sent a messenger to ask Dvārakādīśa, “Why are You hiding? Where is Your flute, peacock feather and dress of Vṛndāvana? Have You changed Your father and mother? Do You have any new, beautiful beloveds from Dvārakā or Mathurā? Why are You not coming forward?” Hearing this, Dvārakādīśa began to cry bitterly, remembering the pastimes of Vṛndāvana. The author and his party told Him that Śrīmatījī had sent them to see how He was. “She is lamenting for You,” they said. Dvārakādīśa then promised that He would return to Vṛndāvana in a day or two. The devotees then returned to their *maṭha*.

The *Purāṇas* and other sacred texts mention many more places worth seeing other than the ones listed above; however, most of these places have now disappeared.

Chapter 2

Madhuvana

Madhuvana lies south-west of Śrī Mathurā, about two and a half miles from Bhūteśvara Mahādeva. It is one of Braja’s twelve famous forests. In Satya-yuga, Bhagavān killed a demon named Madhu here, for which He became

known as Madhusūdana. Likewise, this forest became known as Madhuvana. It is as beloved and sweet as Bhagavān Śrī Madhusūdana Himself.¹

Another name of Madhusūdana is Mādhava, because He is the *dhava* (beloved) of Śrīmatī Rādhikā, who is *sarva lakṣmī-mayī*, the foremost among all Lakṣmīs. This Śrī Mādhava is the *adhiṣṭhātrī devatā* of this forest. While taking bath here or performing *ācamana* when visiting this forest, one should chant the following *mantra* - *om hrām hrīm madhuvanādhi-pataye mādhavāya namaḥ svāhā*. Chanting this *mantra* renders one's *parikramā* of this forest successful. The present name of Madhuvana is Maholī Grāma. On the eastern side of this village of Maholī is Dhruva Tīlā, where the deities of the child Dhruva and his worshipable four-handed Nārāyaṇa reside. Dhruva performed severe austerities here to attract Bhagavān, using the *mantra* Devarṣi Nārada had given him. Being pleased with his worship, Bhagavān appeared before Dhruva and awarded him absolute monarchy over the entire Earth for thirty-six thousand years and, following this, rulership of Dhruva Loka, an imperishable abode of Śrī Hari within this material universe. In Tretā-yuga, the *ṛṣis*, *munis* and other residents of Madhuvana were terrified by the atrocities committed by the Madhu demon, who had obtained a trident from Śaṅkarajī after performing severe austerities. So long as that trident remained in Madhu's hands, no demigod, demon or human being could defeat him. Although Madhu was a prince in the *sūrya-varṇśa*, the dynasty of the Sun, he became very cruel and devoid of good conduct due to bad association. His father rejected him and banished him from his kingdom. Madhu lived in Madhuvana, where he established a new kingdom and began to harass everyone. Māndhātā, the highly illustrious king of the *sūrya-varṇśa*, wanted to punish Madhu and therefore attacked him. However, he was slain by the trident given to the Madhu demon by Śaṅkara.

Before his death, Madhu-daitya gave that trident to his son, Lavaṇāsura, telling him that no one would be able to kill him so long as it remained in his hands. Rather, this infallible trident would kill all his enemies.

Trident in hand, Lavaṇāsura became an oppressor even crueler than his father. Distressed by his atrocities, the *ṛṣis* and *maharṣis* of Madhuvana and other, surrounding areas went to Śrī Rāma in Ayodhyā and humbly prayed for protection from Lavaṇāsura. They informed Him of Lavaṇāsura's might and of his infallible trident that rendered him invincible. It would only be possible to kill him, they explained, when he did not have his trident at hand. In Ayodhyā, Bhagavān Śrī Rāmacandrajī coronated his younger brother Śatrughnajī as the king of Madhuvana. Śatrughnajī asked Śrī Rāmacandrajī for the powerful deity of Śrī Varāha that Śrī Rāmacandrajī had brought back from Laṅkā for worship, and his elder brother happily gave him this deity. Śatrughnajī then went with the *ṛṣis* and *maharṣis* to the *āśrama* of Vālmīki Ṛṣi and after receiving his blessings, proceeded to Madhuvana. Bow and arrows in hand, Śatrughnajī arrived at the entrance of Lavaṇāsura's cave when Lavaṇāsura had gone hunting in the woods, having left his trident behind in the cave. When the demon returned, carrying elephants, deer and

many other animals that he had killed, Śatrughnajī challenged him and a fierce fight ensued. Lavaṇāsura desperately tried to retrieve his trident by one means or another, but Śrī Śatrughna, the highly valourous warrior and subduer of his enemies, obstructed him and succeeded in cutting off his head with his sharp arrows. Śatrughnajī then settled in the deserted Madhupurī and established Bhagavān Varāhadeva there. This Ādi Varāhadeva is still present at the very same location in today's Mathurā, which lies within Madhuvana. Bhagavān Mādhava's dear Madhu Kuṇḍa also lies in Madhuvana, and is now called Kṛṣṇa Kuṇḍa. Nearby is the cave of Lavaṇāsura. On the bank of Kṛṣṇa Kuṇḍa is the beautiful deity of Bhagavān Śatrughnajī.

Towards the end of Dvāpara-yuga, Śrī Kṛṣṇa would take *lākhs* of cows out to graze, walking behind them and calling out their names: "Dhaulī! Dhūmrī! Kālindī! ..." He would make sounds to instruct them, such as *Hiyo-hiyo!* ("Come! Come!"), *Dhīrī-dhīrī!* ("Slowly! Slowly!") and *Tīrī-tīrī!* ("Come to the river-bank to drink!"). As He walked with Dāū Bhaiyā, He would sometimes play His sweet flute and sometimes laugh and joke as He placed His hands on the shoulders of the *sakhās*. Sometimes His thirsty eyes would look with sidelong glances at the *gopīs* who were hiding within the *kuṣjas*. As the boys herded the cows, delightful uproars would break out amongst them. In this way, the sweet nectar of *prema* used to shower everywhere in Madhuvana, and Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Śrī Balarāmajī would relish it while grazing the cows. Hiding in the *kuṣjas* or on the balconies or windows of their palaces, the *braja-ramaṇīs* used to perform *āratī* of Kṛṣṇa with their loving sidelong glances as He entered and returned from the forest. Kṛṣṇa would show that He accepted this *āratī* by the movement of His own eyes. To the *braja-ramaṇīs*, even a second in separation from Kṛṣṇa would feel like millions of *yugas* and a *yuga* in His company would seem like a fraction of a second.

Kṛṣṇa's cowherding pastimes in Madhuvana are as sweet as *madhu* (honey) and beyond description. In Kali-yuga, about five hundred years ago, Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu visited Braja and came to Madhu-vana, where the *sphūrti*, or momen-tary vision, of Śrī Kṛṣṇa's pastimes overwhelmed Him with ecstasy. Each year, many groups of pilgrims stop here to rest.

It is well known that Dāūjī and the *sakhās* used to dance in Madhu-vana and thus relish its sweet nectar. Today, one can also take *darśana* of the black deity of Dāūjī here. There is a deep secret behind this deity. After leaving Vṛndāvana and Mathurā, Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Baladeva resided in Dvārakā with Their relatives. When Baladevajī heard about the restlessness and lamentation of all of Braja in separation from Śrī Kṛṣṇa, He wanted to take Kṛṣṇa there. However, because of some delay in Śrī Kṛṣṇa's being able to go to Vṛndāvana, Baladevajī went there alone and tried to console everyone as far as possible. However, when He saw their state of separation, He Himself became distressed in *viraha* from Kṛṣṇa. Meditating upon Śyāma and His *braja-līlās*, He began to relish *śyāma-rasa*, and Himself took on a *śyāma* complexion. This *śyāma-rasa*, or nectar of Kṛṣṇa, is the only *madhu* (sweet

honey). Baladeva relishes it eternally and thus remains always immersed in the ecstasy of *kṛṣṇa-prema*.

Chapter 3

Tālavana

*aho tālavanam puṇyam
yatra tālairhato suraḥ
hitāya yādavānāśca
ātmakrīḍanakāya ca*

(Skanda Purāṇa)

“Aho! This is the same Tālavana where Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Śrī Balarāmajī killed Dhenukāsura, the ass-demon, for the benefit of the Yādavas and for the entertainment of the *sakhās*.” This forest is situated about two and a half miles south-west of Madhuvana and was once a beautiful, inviting forest full of *tāla* (palm) trees. Cruel Kaṁsa had appointed one of his followers, Dhenukāsura, to guard this forest, a duty he carefully performed along with his many wives and sons. Only Mahārāja Kaṁsa and his followers used to enjoy the sweet *tāla* fruits of this forest, which were otherwise inaccessible to ordinary people.

One day, while herding the cows, Kṛṣṇa and Baladeva together with the *sakhās* wandered near Tālavana. The *sakhās* were very hungry, and they requested Kṛṣṇa and Baladeva to protect them from the demon of hunger. They also said that they could detect the fragrance of sweet, ripe *tāla* fruits coming from a nearby place. Hearing this, Kṛṣṇa and Baladeva led the *sakhās* to Tālavana.¹ There, Baladevajī shook a tree full of ripe fruits. At once, the fruits started to fall to the ground making a *dhap-dhap* sound, and the cowherd boys jumped about in ecstasy. Hearing the sound of the falling fruits, Dhenukāsura and his followers attacked Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma with great force, kicking Them with their hind legs. Without strain or effort, Baladeva Prabhu caught the hind legs of the valourous Dhenukāsura and, whirling him around in the sky, threw him on to the top of a huge *tāla* tree. Passing stool and urine, the demon died. Kṛṣṇa then started killing the followers of Dhenukāsura, and soon the entire Tālavana became contaminated with the urine, stool and blood of the donkeys. All the *tāla* trees fell upon each other and were thus destroyed. Later, when Tālavana became a clean place once more, the *sakhās* could easily go there, as could the people in general.

This pastime carries some deep and important teachings. Śrī Baladeva Prabhu is *akhaṇḍa guru-tattva*. Only by *śrī gurudeva*’s mercy can a *sādhaka* protect his heart from ignorance. In other words, only *śrī gurudeva* can remove all types of ignorance from a sincere disciple and infuse his heart with *kṛṣṇa-bhakti*. Dhenukāsura is the embodiment of ignorance. Realization of *kṛṣṇa-tattva*, *bhakti-tattva* and *māyā-tattva* is possible by the mercy of Śrī Baladeva Prabhu, the *akhaṇḍa guru-tattva*. Only then will *bhakti* for Kṛṣṇa become strong and fixed.

Due to foolishness, donkeys carry all kinds of loads in this material world. They tolerate the kicks of the she-donkeys and the beatings of the washermen, and they are very lusty. Those who out of gross foolishness neglect to perform *bhajana* of Bhagavān, and who thus carry all the bad qualities of a donkey, become very lean and thin during the rainy season when there is plenty of grass and become very fat during the summer when there is little grass. This is because the donkey is so foolish that when he sees the abundance of grass during the rainy season, he thinks that he must not have eaten anything; and when he sees the scarcity of grass during the summer, he thinks that he must have eaten it all up.

Here, at Tālavana, lies Balabhadra Kuṇḍa and the *man-dīra* of Baladevajī. Tālavana is situated six miles south of Mathurā and two miles south-west of Madhuvana.

Chapter 4

Kumudavana

Two miles west of Tālavana is Kumudavana, which pre-sently goes by the name Kudaravana. The *kuṇḍa* here is called Kumudinī Kuṇḍa or Vihāra Kuṇḍa. While cowherding, Śrī Kṛṣṇa, Śrī Balarāmajī and the *sakhās* used to wander throughout this beautiful place. Śrī Kṛṣṇa Himself used to sport in this *kuṇḍa* with the *sakhās*, and by sweet words He would call the cows here. He would tell them to drink water, calling out, *Cūṇ-cūṇ!*; and he would then summon them to the bank by exclaiming *Tīrī-tīrī!* The boys used to garland each other with *kumudinī* flowers. Sometimes, unseen by His *sakhās*, Kṛṣṇa performed games in the water (*jal-vihāra*) here with Śrīmatī Rādhikā, Lalitā, Viśākhā and other *priya-narma sakhīs*. There is currently a *mūrti* of Śrī Kapiladevajī on the bank of the *kuṇḍa*. Bhagavān Kapila worshipped Svayaṁ Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa at this place.

From here, the pilgrimage of Braja (*braja-yātrā*) proceeds to Bahulāvana via Śāntanu Kuṇḍa. In the neighbourhood are found the pastime-places of Uspār, Mānako Nagara, Lagāyo, Gaṇeśārā (Gandheśvarīvana), Datihā (Datīya), Āyore, Gorvāī, Chaṭṭīkarā and Garuḍa-Govinda, which are all worth visiting.

Datihā (Datīya)

This place lies approximately six miles west of Mathurā and two miles from Śāntanu Kuṇḍa. Śrī Kṛṣṇa killed Dantavakra here. According to the *Padma Purāṇa*, Nanda and all the Brajabāsīs, including Śrī Kṛṣṇa's beloved *gopīs*, went to Kurukṣetra at the time of a solar eclipse to meet Kṛṣṇa. "I shall soon return to Braja," Kṛṣṇa repeatedly assured them, and He sent them home. Although the *gopas* and *gopīs* returned to Braja with Nanda Bābā, instead of going back to Gokula-Mahāvana, they waited for Kṛṣṇa near Datihā on the other side of the Yamunā. The village in which they stayed while waiting for Kṛṣṇa is called Magerā or Magherā. After Śrī Kṛṣṇa killed Śīsupāla, He returned to Braja and killed Dantavakra at this place. He then crossed the Yamunā and met with His parents and the other Brajabāsīs. Because Dantavakra was killed here, this place is called Datihā.

Āyore

As soon as the Brajabāsīs saw Śrī Kṛṣṇa, they happily called out, *Āyore! Āyore!* (“He has come! He has come!”). Nanda Bābā and Yaśodā met Kṛṣṇa with great affection. During the Muslim rule, this village was named Ālīpura, and is still known by this name today.

Gaurava (Gorvāi)

Gorvāi lies three miles north-east of Gokula. When Nanda Bābā returned from Kurukṣetra, the *zamīndār* of this village welcomed him with great honour. The name of this place thus became Gaurava, which means ‘dignity’ or ‘respect’, and then later Gorvāi. Today, this village is known as Guru.

Śakaṭīkarā

The current name of this place is Chaṭṭīkarā. It is situated on the Delhi-Mathurā highway, four miles from Mathurā and about two miles from Vṛndāvana. Becoming concerned by the violence of the demons in Gokula-Mahāvana, Nanda Bābā came to Śakaṭīkarā with all the Brajabāsīs. The Brajabāsīs established their living place here by arranging their hundreds of thousands of bullock-carts in the shape of a crescent moon. This place became known as Śakaṭīkarā because the Brajabāsīs used bullock-carts (*śakaṭa*) to set up residence. Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Śrī Balarāma would go from here to sweet Vṛndāvana and other nearby places to graze the calves and cows. Kṛṣṇa performed *rāsa-līlā* and other *braja-līlās* from here. At that time, Vṛndāvana, the place of Śrī Kṛṣṇa’s *līlā-vilāsa*, was not a prosperous city, but rather was a rural area ornamented with many varieties of *kuṣṇas*, creepers and attractive forests.

Garuḍa-Govinda

Kṛṣṇa performed various pastimes (*vihāra*) at this place, which lies near Śakaṭīkarā. One day while grazing the cows, Śrī Kṛṣṇa was immersed in playing different games here with the *sakhās*. In their play, Kṛṣṇa made Śrīdāma Sakhā assume the role of Garuḍa. He then climbed on his back, acting as if Lakṣmīpati Nārāyaṇa Himself had just mounted Garuḍa’s back. Even today, one can take *darśana* of Govindajī with Śrīdāma as Garuḍa.

This location is also connected with *rāma-līlā*. When the serpents released by Meghanātha bound Rāmacandrajī in their coils, He became helpless. Hearing of this from Devaṛṣi Nārada, Garuḍa came to the rescue. As soon as the serpents saw Garuḍa, they released Rāmacandrajī and fled. This incident left Garuḍajī a little doubtful as to whether Śrī Rāma was in fact Bhagavān. However, by associating with Mahātmā Kakabhuṣuṇḍī and by receiving *darśana* of Śrī Kṛṣṇa at the time of *kṛṣṇa-līlā*, this delusion was later removed. The place where Garuḍa had *darśana* of Śrī Govinda, the maintainer of the cows and *gopas*, is known as Garuḍa-Govinda. At that time, Śrī Kṛṣṇa climbed upon his back and assured him that He was indeed Bhagavān.

Gandheśvarī

The present name of this village is Gaṇeśarā Gaon. Śrī Kṛṣṇa and the *sakhās* used to smear aromatic (*gandha*) substances on their bodies while out grazing the cows. It is said that Śrī Kṛṣṇa became intoxicated by the fragrance emanating from the body of Śrīmatī Rādhikā, who was hiding nearby with Her girlfriends.¹ Seeing Śrīmatījī, the flute slipped from His hands, His peacock-feather crown fell at Her lotus feet, and He fainted.² This place is therefore called Gandheśvarī Tīrtha, Gāndharvā being another name of Śrīmatī Rādhikā. To this day, Gāndharvā Kuṇḍa continues to celebrate the triumphant amorous pastimes of Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa. In modern times, the name Gandheśvarī has degenerated to Gaṇeśarā.

Khecarī Gaon

This village is situated two miles west of Mathurā and one mile north-east of Śāntanu Kuṇḍa. *Khecarī* refers to the *rākṣasī* Pūtanā who roamed the sky. Kāṁsa knew about her power and adopted her as his sister. On his request, the impure Pūtanā, who could transform herself into many forms and who used to drink the blood and eat the flesh of small children, came in the guise of a beautiful mother to Nanda Bhavan to kill Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Although her breasts were smeared with a deadly poison, Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the ocean of causeless mercy, sucked out her life along with the poison, and bestowed upon her the position of a mother in the transcendental world. Khecarī Gaon is the place of residence of the *rākṣasī* Pūtanā.

Śāntanu Kuṇḍa

This is the place where Mahārāja Śāntanu performed *tapasyā*. Its present name is Satohā, and it is situated on the Govardhana road about three miles from Mathurā. Mahārāja Śāntanu worshipped Bhagavān here with the desire to beget a son. This son was famous as grandsire Bhīṣma. The name of Bhīṣma's mother was Gaṅgā. However, for a particular reason, Gaṅgājī left Śāntanu Mahārāja, and the king then became attracted to Matsyagandhā (Urvaśī's daughter Satyawatī), or Matsyodarī, who possessed great beauty. She was living in the house of a fisherman across the Yamunā opposite Mathurā. Mahārāja Śāntanu desired to marry her, but the fisherman, Dāśarāja, was unwilling to give him his adopted daughter in marriage. He said, "If you accept the condition that the son born from my daughter will be the successor to your kingdom, then you can marry her." Mahārāja Śāntanu refused this proposal for the sake of Crown-Prince Devavrata (Bhīṣma), yet his heart felt great sadness. When Prince Devavrata came to know of this, he went to the house of that fisherman and vowed to remain a life-long *brahmacārī*. He promised that the child born from Matsyodarī, that is to say, the fisherman's grandson, would ascend the throne. Thus, he was able to arrange for the fisherman's daughter to marry his father Mahārāja Śāntanu.

It is believed that while Hastināpura was Mahārāja Śāntanu's capital, he also had a place of residence here at Śāntanu Kuṇḍa.

Women who desire a child take bath in this *kuṇḍa*. They make a *svastika* out of cowdung behind the temple and perform *pūjā* to it. In the middle of Śāntanu Kuṇḍa, on a raised hill, is the temple of Śāntanu's worshipable deity, Śrī Śāntanu-Bihārījī.

Chapter 5

Bahulāvana

Bahulāvana is a very beautiful forest. According to the *Skanda Purāṇa* (*Mathurā-khaṇḍa*), Śrī Hari's *sakhī* or *gopī* Bahulā resides here – *bahulā śrīhareḥ patnī tatra tiṣṭhati sarvadā*. This place is now called Bātī. It lies seven miles west of Mathurā, between Rādhā Kuṇḍa and Vṛndāvana. Saṅkarṣaṇa Kuṇḍa and Māna Sarovara are two *kuṇḍas* situated in this forest. Once, when Śrīmatī Rādhikā was in *māna*, She hid Herself in a *kuṣja* in Bahulāvana. In separation from Her, Kṛṣṇa became very distressed. He was able to find Śrīmatī Rādhikā with the help of the *sakhīs*, and with great difficulty He pacified Her *māna*.

It is popularly believed that if a person has a particular desire and takes bath here, that desire will be fulfilled. In the temple on the bank of Saṅkarṣaṇa Kuṇḍa are *mūrtis* of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, a tiger, a cow, its calf and a *brāhmaṇa*. According to local lore, a cow named Bahulā was once drinking water from this pond when a fierce tiger attacked and caught her. She assured the tiger that she would come back to be eaten after she had first returned to the house of her master, a *brāhmaṇa*, and fed milk to her hungry calf. Upon returning home, she asked her calf to drink milk to his full satisfaction and told him about her promise to the tiger. The calf insisted on going with her without drinking any milk. The *brāhmaṇa* also prepared himself to go alone, leaving the cow and calf at home, with the intention of giving himself over as food for the tiger. In the end, all three approached the tiger, each willing to sacrifice himself. At that moment, Śrī Kṛṣṇa manifested Himself there, and the tiger underwent a change of heart. By the mercy of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the *brāhmaṇa* returned home safely with his cow and calf.

Śrī Rādhā Kuṇḍa lies within Bahulāvana, and it is therefore customary to take bath in Śrī Rādhā Kuṇḍa on the day of Bahulāṣṭamī. A huge assembly of people bathe in Śrī Rādhā Kuṇḍa on that day.

When Bhagavān Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu wandered through the different forests, He became overwhelmed upon seeing the natural beauty of this place. A very beautiful and heart-rending description of this is given in *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta* (*Madhya*, chapter 17) as follows. When Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu entered Bahulāvana, the beautiful cows grazing there surrounded him. They stopped eating the grass and, overflowing with *prema*, began to bellow and lick His body. Seeing the affectionate *vātsalya* (motherly mood) of the cows, Mahāprabhu became completely absorbed in ecstatic waves of *prema*. When He regained some external consciousness, Mahāprabhu began caressing the cows, who also did not want to give up His

association but were forced onwards with great difficulty by the cowherd-men. Then, Mahāprabhu again became deeply absorbed in *bhāva* and was weeping and calling out, *Kothāya kṛṣṇa! Kothāya kṛṣṇa!* (“Where is Kṛṣṇa? Where is Kṛṣṇa?”). Herds of deer and does gathered there and fearlessly began to lick Mahāprabhu’s limbs with affection. The *śukas*, *sārīs*, *kokilas*, *papīhās* and bees began singing in the fifth note, and the peacocks proceeded to dance before Mahāprabhu. The trees and creepers became jubilant and covered themselves in buds, new leaves and flowers. With their arm-like branches and twigs, they lovingly offered their flowers and fruits at the lotus feet of Mahāprabhu.

Seeing these ecstatic emotions of the moving and non-moving entities of Vṛndāvana, Mahāprabhu became even more absorbed in *bhāva* and called out in a loud voice, “Chant ‘Kṛṣṇa’! Chant ‘Kṛṣṇa’!” All the moving and non-moving entities of Braja echoed His words. Sometimes Mahāprabhu clasped hold of the necks of the deer and does and cried piteously. They gazed at Mahāprabhu’s lotus face with love-filled glances and tearful eyes.

Advancing a little further, Mahāprabhuji saw a *śuka* and *sārī* sitting on two opposite branches. A *prema-kalaha* (loving quarrel) glorifying Śrī Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa Yugala was taking place between them.

Śuka: My Kṛṣṇa is *madana-mohana*, the enchanter of Cupid’s mind.

Sārī: Yes, He is – as long as my Rādhā is at His left side. Otherwise, He is only *madana*.

Śuka: My Kṛṣṇa held Girirāja on His finger.

Sārī: Because my Rādhā transmitted *śakti* into Him; otherwise, how could He have done so?

Śuka: My Kṛṣṇa is the life of the whole universe.

Sārī: My Rādhā is the life of that life.

Śuka: My Kṛṣṇa’s head is decorated with a peacock-feather.

Sārī: Only because my Rādhā’s name is marked on that feather.

Śuka: The peacock-feather on my Kṛṣṇa’s head leans to the left.

Sārī: Because it wants to bow down to my Rādhā’s feet.

Śuka: My Kṛṣṇa is the moon.

Sārī: My Rādhā is the trap that captures that moon.

Śuka: There is no need to quarrel uselessly. Let us both glorify Yugala Kīśora together.

Sārī: I accept with great pleasure.

This loving quarrel between *śuka* and *sārī* is also described in *Govinda-līlāmṛta*. Here, the *śuka* says (13.29):

*saundaryam lalanāli-dhairya-dalanam līlā ramā-stambhini
tīryām kandukitādri-varyam amalāḥ pāre-parārdham guṇāḥ
śīlām sarva-janānuraṣjanam aho yasyāyam asmat-prabhur viśvaṁ
viśva-janīna-kīrtir avatāt kṛṣṇe jagam-mohanaḥ*

“May Prabhu Jagamohana, whose unparalleled beauty plunders the wealth of patience of an innumerable multitude of women, whose world-famous

glory astounds even Lakṣmīdevī, whose strength turns *girivara* Govardhana into a child's toy, who has unlimited qualities, whose simple disposition entertains everyone, and whose glory substantiates the welfare of the entire universe, protect the entire world."

Hearing this, the *sārī* replies (*Govinda-līlāmṛta* 13.30):

*śrī-rādhikāyāḥ priyatā svarūpatā
suśīlatā nartana-gāna-cāturī
guṇāli-sampata kavitā ca rājate
jagan-mohana-citta-mohinī*

"*Śuka!* Śrī Rādhikā's *prema*, beauty, dancing, excellent calmness, expertise in music, wealth of good qualities, and poetic compositions, or in other words, Her erudition, are all so attractive that She steals away the heart of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, who enchants the heart of the entire universe."

The *śuka* then says (*Govinda-līlāmṛta* 13.31):

*varṁśī-dhārī jagan-nārī
citta-hārī sa sārīke
vihārī gopa-nārībhir
jīyān madana-mohanaḥ*

"*Sārīke!* All glories to Śrī Madhana-Mohana, the enchanter of Cupid, who carries a *varṁśī*. He steals the heart of all the women in the entire universe, and wanders here and there with the *gopīs* to enjoy with them."

Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu became so overwhelmed upon hearing this love-quarrel between *śuka* and *sārī* that He could not maintain His equilibrium and fell down on the earth in a faint. His companions somehow brought Him back to consciousness, after which He continued His *parikramā* of Braja.

Śaknā Gaon

This village is situated one mile from Bāṭī Gaon. Here, one can take *darśana* of Balabhadra and Dāūjī.

Toṣa Gaon

Toṣa Gopa, an expert dancer, lived in this village. He taught Śrī Kṛṣṇa how to dance expertly too, by which Kṛṣṇa became very satisfied. Tarasa Kuṇḍa lies here. Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma and the cows and cowherd boys used to feel very satisfied when they drank the water of this *kuṇḍa*. *Toṣa* means 'satisfaction', and this village is therefore called Toṣa Gaon.

Jakhina Grāma

This village lies two miles from Toṣa Gaon. Its previous name was Dakṣiṇa Grāma. While Śrīmatī Rādhikā's *vāmya bhāva* (leftist mood) is renowned and is most pleasing to Śrī Kṛṣṇa, each and every *bhāva* in every *nāyikā* in fact exists in Śrīmatī Rādhikā. Therefore, sometimes – under some special circum-stances – Kīśorījī pleases Śrī Kṛṣṇa by manifesting the *bhāvas* of a *dakṣiṇa nāyikā* (right-wing heroine). This village is thus also called Dakṣiṇa

Grāma. It is also known as Jakṣiṇa or Jakhina Grāma, because Dāūjī once killed a *yakṣiṇī* who was obstructing Kṛṣṇa's *vilāsa*. Balabhadra Kuṇḍa lies here, and one can take *darśana* of Baladeva and Revatī.

Vihāravana

This is the place of Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa Yugala's *vihāra* where Śrīmatī Rādhikājī tested Kṛṣṇa's dancing skills.

priya ko nacvan sikhavat rādhā pyārī!
mān gumān lakuṭ lie ṭhāḍhī
manthargati jab hi, ḍarpat kuṣj-bihārī

"Rādhā-pyārī is holding a stick of pride and anger (*mān-gumān*) and is teaching Her beloved Kuṣja-bihārī to dance. But when, according to Rādhā-pyārī's instructions, He makes a mistake in a swift movement of the dance, the sharp glances shooting from Pyārījī's eyes punish Him."

Vihāra Kuṇḍa lies here. This is where Kṛṣṇa and His cowherd-boy friends performed water-sports and gave the cows pure and sweet water to drink. Nearby is a very attractive *kadamba-khaṇḍī*, or grove of *kadamba* trees, in which one can see the imprints of Bhagavān's lotus feet under a small canopy.

Basauntī and Rāl Grāma

Basauntī currently goes by the name of Basatī, and Rāl by the name of Rār Grāma. When Nanda Bābā left Gokula-Mahā-vana with his family and moved to Chaṭṭīkarā, his friend Vṛṣabhānu Mahārāja resided in Basauntī Grāma. This place received the name Basauntī because he resided (*bās karnā*) here. Nearby is Rāl Gaon, where Śrīmatījī performed Her childhood pastimes. Basauntī is where She performed some of Her *paugaṇḍa-līlās* (girlhood pastimes). Varsānā, Jāvaṭa and Rādhā Kuṇḍa are places of Her *kiśora-līlās*. However, the place of Her highest and most perfect *līlā-vilāsa* is Śrī Rādhā Kuṇḍa.

Balabhadra Kuṇḍa, Balabhadra Mandira and a *kadamba-khaṇḍī* are nearby.

Aḍīṅga

This village is situated nine miles west of Mathurā on the main road and four miles east of Govardhana. Śrī Kṛṣṇa and His *sakhās* insistently took *dāna* (tax) from the *sakhīs* here, and therefore the name of the village is Aḍīṅga. The Hindi word for 'to insist' is *aḍnā*. Here, in Killola Kuṇḍa, Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma relished joyful water-sports (*jal-killola*).

Mādhurī Kuṇḍa

Two miles south-east of Aḍīṅga is Mādhurī Khora, the very attractive place of Rādhājī's dear *sakhī* Mādhurījī. It is also the place where the poet Mādhurī Dāsajī performed his *bhajana*.

Mayūra Grāma

This place is situated two miles south-west of Bahulāvana. After seeing the dancing of the peacocks (*mayūra*) here, Śrī Kṛṣṇa started dancing with great pleasure in the midst of His beloved *gopīs*. The peacocks very happily gave one of their beautiful multi-coloured feathers to Kṛṣṇa, which He placed on His head. Mayūra Kuṇḍa here is also worth seeing.

Chaknā Grāma

This village is situated near Mayūra Grāma. When Śrī Kṛṣṇa, Balarāma and the *sakhās* were out tending the cows, the *gopīs* fed them *chāch* (buttermilk) here until the boys were completely satisfied.

Chapter 6

Śrī Rādhā Kuṇḍa and

Śrī Śyāma Kuṇḍa

The *Padma Purāṇa* states:

*yathā rādhā priyā viṣṇoḥ
tasyāḥ kuṇḍam priyam tathā
sarva-gopīṣu sevaikā
viṣṇoratyanta-vallabhā*

“Among all the *gopīs*, Śrīmatī Rādhājī is Śrī Kṛṣṇa’s principal *prāṇa-vallabhā*, and is thus the most dear to Him. Similarly, Rādhājī’s dear *kuṇḍa* is also very dear to Him.” The *Varāha Purāṇa* declares:

*sarva-pāpa-haras tīrtham
namaste hari-muktidaḥ
namaḥ kaivalya-nāthāya
rādhā-kṛṣṇa-bhidhāyine*

“O Śrī Rādhā Kuṇḍa! O Śrī Kṛṣṇa Kuṇḍa! You destroy all sins and award one-pointed *prema*. I bow down to you again and again.” The *Purāṇas* are filled with innumerable descriptions of the glories of these two *kuṇḍas*.

In *Vraja-vilāsa-stava* (text 53), Śrīla Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī prays:

*śrī-vṛndāvipinam suramyam api tac chrīmān sa govardhanah
sā rāsa-sthalikāpy alam rasamayī kim tāvad anyat sthalam
yasyāpy amśa-lavena nārhati manāk samyam va mukundasya tat
prāṇebhyo ‘py adhika-priyeva dayitam tat kuṇḍam evāśraye*

“Not even Śrī Vṛndāvana, which is supremely delightful because of places like the *rasa* filled *rāsa-sthalī*, or Śrīman Govardhana, which is the arena of the nectarian *rāsa* where the most confidential amorous pastimes (*keli-kriḍā*) of the Divine Couple take place, are equal to even a shadow of a particle of the glories of Śrī Rādhā Kuṇḍa, what to speak of other pastime-places within Braja Maṇḍala. I take shelter of this Śrī Rādhā Kuṇḍa, which is more dear to Śrī Mukunda than His own life.”

Śrī Rādhā Kuṇḍa lies in a village named Āriṭa Gaon, about three miles north-east of Govardhana and fourteen miles from Mathurā and Vṛndāvana. Ariṣṭāsura was a servant of Kāṁsa who assumed the form of a bull and

attacked Kṛṣṇa with the aim of killing Him, but Kṛṣṇa killed him instead at this place.

At Śrī Rādhā Kuṇḍa, Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa Yugala perform Their midday (*madhyāhnik*) *līlā-vilāsa*, enjoying a variety of amorous pastimes freely and without any obstruction. This is not possible anywhere else. Therefore, Rādhā Kuṇḍa is considered to be the topmost place of *bhajana*, superior even to Nandagaon, Varsānā, Vṛndāvana and Govardhana. This most confidential place, surcharged with the highest and most sublime loving sentiments, was revealed by Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu Himself, who is endowed with the *bhāva* (sentiment) and *kānti* (lustre) of Śrī Rādhā. Previously, Śrī Mādhavendra Purī, Śrī Lokanātha Gosvāmī and Śrī Bhūgarbha Gosvāmī also came to Braja, where they revealed various pastime-places of Kṛṣṇa; but they did not reveal this confidential place, which was personally manifested by Śrī Gaurasundara, who is Śrī Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa combined.

Śrī Kṛṣṇa killed Ariṣṭāsura during the day. That same night, He met with His beloved Śrī Rādhikā and the other *sakhīs* here. Śrī Kṛṣṇa was very eager to embrace Śrīmatī Rādhikā, but as soon as He reached out for Her, She stepped back. Jokingly, She said, “Today, You have killed a bull, which belongs to the cow family. You have therefore committed the sin of killing a cow. Please don’t touch My pure body.”

Smilingly, Kṛṣṇa answered, “*Priyatame!* It was a demon that I killed, who had deceitfully assumed the form of a bull; so how can sin even touch Me?”

Śrīmatījī insisted, “Whatever he was, he was in the form of a bull when You killed him. Hence, you are definitely guilty of the sin of killing a cow.” The *sakhīs* supported Her words.

Śrī Kṛṣṇa asked how He could atone for this sin. Śrīmatījī smiled and answered, “The only atonement is to take bath in all the *tīrthas* of the entire Earth planet.” Hearing this, Śrī Kṛṣṇa created an extensive *kuṇḍa* simply by striking His heel on the ground. He then summoned all the *tīrthas* of the entire planet to it. Uncountable *tīrthas* immediately came before Kṛṣṇa in their personified forms. Kṛṣṇa asked them to enter the *kuṇḍa* in the form of water, and in a moment, the *kuṇḍa* was filled with pure, sacred water. Śrī Kṛṣṇa took bath in that *kuṇḍa* and again tried to touch Śrīmatījī. But, in response to Her Priyatama’s bragging, Śrīmatī Rādhikā now wanted to manifest a *kuṇḍa* full of water that was larger and more exquisite than Kṛṣṇa’s. She and Her *sakhīs* therefore stubbornly dug out a very attractive *kuṇḍa* nearby with their bracelets. However, not so much as a drop of water appeared in it. Kṛṣṇa joked that they could take water from His *kuṇḍa*, but Śrīmatījī along with Her innumerable *sakhīs* prepared themselves to bring water from Mānasī Gaṅgā in clay pots. Śrī Kṛṣṇa signalled to the *tīrthas* that they should insist that Śrīmatījī and Her *sakhīs* fill up their *kuṇḍa* by taking water from His *kuṇḍa*. The *tīrthas* personified offered Śrīmatī Rādhikā and Her *sakhīs* many prayers and thus pleased Her. Śrīmatī Rādhikā then gave them permission to enter Her *kuṇḍa*. Immediately, the current of water that had flowed into Kṛṣṇa Kuṇḍa also filled Rādhā Kuṇḍa. With great pleasure, Śrī

Kṛṣṇa bathed and played in the water (*jal-vihāra*) with Śrīmatī Rādhikā and the *sakhīs* in this dear *kuṇḍa*.

These two *kuṇḍas* manifested at midnight on Kṛṣṇāṣṭamī (the eighth day of the dark moon) in the month of Kārtika. Hundreds and thousands of people therefore bathe here at midnight on this day known as Bahulāṣṭamī.

The *Padma Purāṇa* states:

*govardhana girau ramye / rādhā-kuṇḍam priyaṁ hareḥ
kārtika bahulāṣṭamyām / tatra snātvā hareḥ priyaḥ
naro bhakto bhaved vitat / sthitasya tasya pratoṣaṇām*

“Radiantly beautiful Śrī Rādhā Kuṇḍa is situated at the foot of Govardhana Hill. Faithful persons who bathe here on Kṛṣṇāṣṭamī in the Kārtika month receive *premā-bhakti* filled with the *sevā* of Śrī Rādhā-Kuṣjabihārī Śrī Hari.”

The *Padma Purāṇa* also states:

*dīpotsave kārtike ca / rādhā-kuṇḍe yudhiṣṭhira
dṛśyate sakalaṁ viśvaṁ / bhrtyair viṣṇu-parāyaṇaiḥ*

“*Ekāntika* (one-pointed) *bhaktas* of Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa who go to Śrī Rādhā Kuṇḍa on the day of Dīpāvalī in the month of Kārtika are granted a vision of the complete Braja Maṇḍala and the entire universe as well.”

Some time later, when Śrī Kṛṣṇa had left for Dvārakā, both *kuṇḍas* disappeared. While manifesting the pastime-places of Braja, Śrī Kṛṣṇa’s great-grandson, Mahārāja Vajranābha, restored these two *kuṇḍas* under the guidance of Śāṇḍilya and other *ṛṣīs*. Five thousand years later, however, they had again disappeared. When Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu came to this place, He inquired from the local people about Rādhā Kuṇḍa and Śyāma Kuṇḍa, but they could provide Him with no information. Instead, they told Him about the two fields named Kālī Khet and Gaurī Khet that lay before them, which contained a little water. Mahāprabhu respectfully addressed Kālī Khet as Śyāma Kuṇḍa and Gaurī Khet as Rādhā Kuṇḍa and offered them His *praṇāmas*. Then, as He bathed in them, He became overwhelmed. Losing all patience, He cried out, “*Hā Rādhe! Hā Kṛṣṇa!*” and fainted. The place where He sat down is now called Tamāla Talā; it is also known as Mahāprabhu’s *baiṭhaka* (sitting-place).

After the disappearance of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu, Śrī Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī came from Jagannātha Purī and performed *bhajana* at Rādhā Kuṇḍa. Once, the Mughal emperor Akbara was making his way along this path with his vast army. The emperor’s divisions of men, elephants, horses and camels were very thirsty. Seeing Dāsa Gosvāmī, Akbara asked, “Is there any big pond nearby?” Dāsa Gosvāmī motioned to him to take water from Kālī Khet and Gaurī Khet. The emperor thought, “This water is not sufficient even for a single elephant. How will it quench the thirst of my entire army?” However, on the repeated requests of Dāsa Gosvāmī, Emperor Akbara encouraged his men to drink. To his utter amazement, the entire army together with horses, elephants and camels drank to their full satisfaction,

and yet the water in these ponds did not reduce even slightly. The emperor's astonishment knew no bounds.

After performing *bhajana* here for some time, the thought of restoring these two *kuṇḍas* entered the mind of Śrī Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī. However, when he remembered the transcendental glories of Śrī Rādhā Kuṇḍa, he began to reproach himself for thinking this. Just then, a wealthy person arrived at that place from Badrikāśrama, looking for that supreme renunciate Śrī Dāsa Gosvāmī. He offered his *daṇḍavat praṇāmas* at the feet of Gosvāmījī and said, "I am returning from a pilgrimage to Badarikāśrama. Bhagavān Śrī Badrī-Nārāyaṇa has sent me to you. On His order I am offering to cover all the expenses required to restore these two *kuṇḍas* to their original, charming forms. Kindly accept my offer." Śrī Dāsa Gosvāmī became overjoyed. At first he rejected the offer, but he later relented, knowing it to be the desire of Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa. He thus began the work of reconstructing the two *kuṇḍas*.

Śrī Rādhā Kuṇḍa easily manifested in the shape of an elegant quadrangle. The construction work on Śyāma Kuṇḍa then began, with the idea that it should also be quadrangular. To achieve this, some trees on its bank needed to be cut down. That night, while Śrī Dāsa Gosvāmī was performing *bhajana*, he dozed off for a short time. In a dream, he saw five persons standing in front of him. "We are the five Pāṇḍavas," they said. "As trees, we are worshipping Yugala Kīśora here, so please don't cut us down. Rather, let the shape of the *kuṇḍa* be crooked." For this reason, Śrī Dāsa Gosvāmī did not have the trees cut down and instead allowed the *kuṇḍa's* shape to be crooked, just as Śrī Kṛṣṇa is crooked. He only deepened the *kuṇḍa* and had its *ghāṭas* properly restored. Both *kuṇḍas* still have these shapes today, and over the years only a few repairs have been carried out.

Śrī Girirāja-Govardhana stretches out from north to south, taking the shape of a peacock. His tail in the south is called Pūcharī, and his two eyes on his face in the north are called Śrī Rādhā Kuṇḍa and Śrī Śyāma Kuṇḍa.

In *Kṛṣṇa-bhāvanāmṛta*, Śrīla Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura describes Śrī Rādhā Kuṇḍa and Śrī Śyāma Kuṇḍa in a delightful and charming way. Brajendra-nāndana Śrī Kṛṣṇa is the source of all *avatāras*; He is the origin of everything and is yet without any origin; He is *akhila rasāmṛta-mūrti* (the personification of all nectarean mellows) and *sarva-śaktimān* (the source of all *śaktis*). Even so, He is subservient to the *prema* of *mahābhāva svarūpā* Śrīmatī Rādhikā, the topmost of all of Kṛṣṇa's beloveds. He always broadcasts the glories of His *priyatamā* Śrī Kīśorījī, considering Her superior to Himself. Śrī Rādhā Kuṇḍa and Śyāma Kuṇḍa are non-different from the *svaṛūpas* of Śrī Rādhā and Śyāmasundara, and thus Kṛṣṇa also attributes more importance to Śrī Rādhā Kuṇḍa than to Śrī Śyāma Kuṇḍa.

In the northern part of Śrī Rādhā Kuṇḍa is the *kuṣja* of Śrī Lalitā-devī, Lalitānandada, which is shaped like a golden, eight-petalled lotus. In the north-east is Viśākhānandada, the bejewelled *kuṣja* of Viśākhā Sakhī, which is shaped like a sixteen-petalled lotus. In the east is Citrānandada, the *kuṣja*

of Citrā Sakhī, which displays an amazing variety of forms and colours. In the south-east is the *kuṣja* of Indulekhā Sakhī, Indulekhānandada. It is shaped like an eight-petalled lotus and is made of diamonds. In the south is the *kuṣja* of Campakalatā Sakhī, Campakalatānandada Kuṣja, shaped like a golden lotus. And in the south-west is the lotus-like *kuṣja* of Raṅgadevī, Raṅgadevī-sukhada, which is inlaid with blue sapphires. Tuṅgavidyānandada is the *kuṣja* of Tuṅgavidyā Sakhī. This *kuṣja*, in the west, resembles a lotus made of red rubies. In the north-west lies Ānandada or Sudevī-sukhada Kuṣja, the lotus-shaped *kuṣja* of Sudevījī, which is inlaid with emeralds. In the center of Śrī Rādhā Kuṇḍa is Anaṅgamaṣjarī-ānandada Kuṣja, shaped like a sixteen-petalled lotus inlaid with moonstones. This *kuṣja*, also known as Svānandasukhada Kuṣja, belongs to Anaṅga Maṣjarī. It is connected with the bank by a bridge made of moonstones.

Similarly, around Śrī Śyāma Kuṇḍa are the *kuṣjas* of the *sakhās*. In the north-western area of the *kuṇḍa* is a delightful place made of diamonds, emeralds and other precious stones where Śrīmatī Rādhikā daily takes bath. North of this place is Subalānandada Kuṣja, which Subala Sakhā has offered to Śrīmatī Rādhikā. Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa perform resting pastimes (*śayana-vihāra*) here. In the northern part of Śyāma Kuṇḍa is the *kuṣja* of Madhumaṅgalajī, Madhumaṅgalānandada, which is inlaid with white jewels. He has offered this *kuṣja* to Lalitājī. Here Śrī Yugala-Kiśora enjoy all kinds of joking and laughing. Ujjvala Sakhā's Ujjvalānandada Kuṣja in the north-east, made of red jewels, has been given to Viśākhā Sakhī. In the east is Arjuna Sakhā's Arjunānandada Kuṣja, made of blue sapphires, which has been donated to Citrā Sakhī. Gandharvānandada Kuṣja in the south-east displays a variety of colours and forms, and belongs to Gandharva Sakhā. He has offered it to Indulekhā Sakhī. In the south is the green emerald Vidagdhanandada Kuṣja, belonging to Vidagdha Sakhā. He has given this *kuṣja* to Campakalatā. Here Yugala Kiśora play the game of *chaupaḍa*.¹ Bhṛṅga Sakhā's Bhṛṅgānandada Kuṣja lies in the south-west, and he has given this *kuṣja* to Raṅgadevī. In the west is Dakṣasanandānanda Kuṣja made of a variety of jewels. Kokila Sakhā's Kokilānandada Kuṣja, also in the west, has been presented to Sudevī. At the *saṅgama*, or juncture, of the two *kuṇḍas* is a platform made of many kinds of jewels; it is also called the Yogapīṭha of *kṛṣṇa-līlā*.

To the south of Śrī Kuṇḍa are jewelled swings hanging from the branches of *campaka* trees. Swings inlaid with precious stones hang from the branches of *kadamba* trees to the east. To the west, swings made of jewels hang from the branches of the mango trees, and to the north jewelled swings hang from the branches of the *maulśrī* trees. *Rasika* Śrī Kṛṣṇa plays on these swings with Śrīmatī Rādhikā and the other *sakhīs*.

Surrounding both Rādhā Kuṇḍa and Śyāma Kuṇḍa are *kalpataru* trees of mango, jackfruit, *kadamba*, *maulśrī* and so forth, which are abundantly laden with flowers and fruits. Around the bases of these trees are platforms made of various precious stones. All seasons are eternally serving Śrī Yugala under the guidance of the spring season. Vṛndā-devī makes all kinds of

arrangements for the *sevā* of the Divine Couple. The cuckoos coo and the peacocks dance and make the sweet *ke-kā* sound. Blue and red lotuses and various kinds of *ketakī* flowers frolic on the waves of the *śrī kuṇḍas* while intoxicated, buzzing bees hover above. Royal swans, *cakravākas* and cranes play in the water with their consorts, making sweet sounds. Different kinds of birds recite love poetry on the branches of the trees, thus giving pleasure to Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa Yugala. Deer and does roam about in the attractive *kuṣjas* nearby. Except for Śrīmatī Rādhikā's most intimate girlfriends, no one can enter this forest.

Jhūlana Talā

On the western side of Śrī Rādhā Kuṇḍa is Jhūlana Talā. Once, Śrī Sanātana Gosvāmī and Śrī Rūpa Gosvāmī were sitting near Śrī Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī's *bhajana kuṭī* on the north-eastern side of Rādhā Kuṇḍa, immersed in *kṛṣṇa-kathā*. Śrī Sanātana Gosvāmī asked Śrī Rūpa Gosvāmī, "Rūpa, what are you writing these days?" Śrī Rūpa Gosvāmī showed Sanātana *Cātu-puṣpāṣjali*, a *stotra* that he had composed. The first *śloka* in that *stotra* is:

*nava-gorocanā-gaurīm
praverendīvarām barām
maṇi-stavaka-vidyoti
veṇī-vyālaṅgaṇā-phaṇām*

"He Vṛndāvaneśvarī! I pay my obeisances to You again and again. You are *gaurāṅgī*, golden-complexioned like ever-fresh *gorocanā*. Your cloth is the colour of a beautiful blue lotus flower and the upper part of Your long hair-braid is decorated with jewels, making it appear like the hood of a black female serpent."

When Śrī Sanātana Gosvāmī read this, he said, "Rūpa! By the phrase *veṇī-vyālaṅgaṇā-phaṇām* you compare the waving, black, curved, braided hair of Śrīmatī Rādhikā to a poisonous black female serpent. The possessor of all qualities Śrīmatī Rādhikā, who is extremely charming, tender and sweet, is the beloved of Kṛṣṇa. I don't like this comparison." Śrī Rūpa Gosvāmī smiled and humbly requested Śrī Sanātana Gosvāmī to suggest a better description, but at that moment Sanātana Gosvāmī could think of no other suitable comparison. "I will correct it later," he said and went on his way, contemplating the matter. When he reached this place to the west of the *kuṇḍa*, he saw a *gopa kiśorī* swinging on a beautiful swing hanging from the branches of a *kadamba* tree. Her friends were pushing Her to and fro, singing a *mallāra rāga*. Śrī Sanātana Gosvāmī saw a black female serpent with an expanded hood slithering on the swaying black tresses of that swinging *kiśorī*. Thinking to save Her from the bite of the serpent, he ran towards Her, shouting, "*Lālī! Lālī!* Beware! There is a black female serpent in Your hair." When he came nearer, however, he saw nothing - no *kiśorī*, no *sakhīs* and no swing. Remembering that scene, he started to cry with happiness and returned to Rūpa Gosvāmī saying, "Rūpa! Your simile is most appropriate. Śrīmatī Kiśorījī granted me the special favour of having *darśana* of Her

curved braid. There is no need for any correction.” It is at this Jhūlana Talā that Śrī Sanātana Gosvāmī had *darśana* of Rādhājī.

Some of the surrounding mandiras

Near a *kadamba* tree in the south-western part of Śrī Rādhā Kuṇḍa is an ancient *mandira* of Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa. According to hearsay, *akiṣcana* Śrī Dāsa Gosvāmī found these deities of Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa while he was renovating the *kuṇḍa* and gave Them to the Brajabāsīs for *sevā*.

Nearby, in the north-western part of Śrī Kṛṣṇa Kuṇḍa is the temple of Śrī Śyāmasundarājī, the worshipable deity of Śrī Śyāmananda Prabhu. North of this temple is Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī’s *ārādhyadeva* Śrī Rādhā-Dāmodarājī, and north of that temple is the *bhajana-kuṭī* of Śrīnivāsa Ācārya Prabhu. There is a *vigraha* of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu in that temple. East of Śrī Śyāmasundarājī’s *mandira*, in the northern part of Śrī Rādhā Kuṇḍa, is the *ghāṭa* and *baithaka* of Śrī Jāhnavā Ṭhākurānī. Near her *ghāṭa* is the temple of Śrī Gopīnāthājī. Adjacent to that temple is Śrī Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī’s place of residence and his *puṣpa samādhi*. Proceeding from here, one comes to the temple of Śrī Govindadeva. Near this temple is the *śilā* of Śrī Girirāja’s tongue. On the eastern bank of Rādhā Kuṇḍa is the *bhajana kuṭī* of Śrī Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmī, and near this place to the east, on the bank of Śyāma Kuṇḍa, is the *bhajana-kuṭī* of Śrī Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī.

Śrī Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī’s bhajana-kuṭī

After coming from Jagannātha Purī, Śrī Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī used to live near Śrī Rādhā Kuṇḍa at Lagmohana Kuṇḍa. Once, during *kṛṣṇa-līlā*, on the day of the Holī festival, Śrīmatī Rādhikā was sitting here with Her girlfriends when Śaṅkhacūḍa unexpectedly seized Her and ran away with Her. Kṛṣṇa pursued and killed him and, removing the jewel from his forehead, gave it to Śrī Baladevajī. He in turn gave the jewel into the hands of Dhaniṣṭhā to give to Śrīmatī Rādhikā. Although Śrī Dāsa Gosvāmī first used to live at this Lagmohana Kuṇḍa, he later began performing *bhajana* on the banks of Śrī Rādhā Kuṇḍa.

One day, Śrī Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī was doing *bhajana* under the open sky at Rādhā Kuṇḍa. He was so absorbed in *bhajana* that he was not even conscious of his body and mind, and streams of tears flowed from his eyes. Occasionally, the words ‘*Hā Rādhe! Hā Rādhe!*’ would come from his mouth. At this time, Śrī Sanātana Gosvāmī would regularly come to see him. From a distance, Śrī Sanātana Gosvāmī once saw a ferocious tiger and tigress walk past Raghunātha dāsa, drink water from the nearby *kuṇḍa* and then return by the same path, as if they had not seen him.

Śrī Sanātana Gosvāmī approached Śrī Dāsa Gosvāmī and very affectionately, like an elder brother, advised him to do *bhajana* in a *bhajana-kuṭī*. Śrī Sanātana had a leaf-hut built for Śrī Dāsa Gosvāmī, and instructed him to perform *bhajana* there. That *bhajana-kuṭī* no longer exists, but a solid *bhajana-kuṭī* made of cement has been constructed in its place.

Near this *bhajana-kuṭī*, the five Pāṇḍavas – Yudhiṣṭhira, Bhīma, Arjuna, Nakula and Sahadeva – and Draupadī per-formed *bhajana* as trees. Some time ago, these trees became *aprakāṣa*, or unmanifest, and disappeared from our vision. Between this *bhajana-kuṭī* and the *bhajana-kuṭī* of Śrī Gopāl Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmī are the *samādhis* of Bhūgarbha Gosvāmī, Dāsa Gosvāmī and Kavirāja Gosvāmī. North of Śrī Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī's *bhajana-kuṭī* is the *bhajana-kuṭī* of Śrī Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī. It is said that he wrote some portions of *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta* here, but most of it was in fact written in his *bhajana-kuṭī* at Śrī Rādhā-Dāmodara Mandira in Vṛndāvana.

Nearby, in the north-eastern area, is the temple of Śrī Gadādhara-Caitanya, and north-west of this temple is the Śrī Rādhā-Govindajī Mandira. One may take *darśana* of the Jihvā Śilā of Śrī Govardhana near the entrance of this temple.

Jihvā Śilā and other nearby places

After finishing his daily morning ablutions, Śrī Dāsa Gosvāmī used to take bath with the water of Gopī Kūpa, situated to the east of Śrī Śyāma Kuṇḍa. He then bathed in Śrī Kuṇḍa. Once, while drawing water from Gopī Kūpa, he also drew a *govardhana-śilā* out of the well. After taking his bath that day, Śrī Dāsa Gosvāmī went on his way; but while doing *bhajana* in a cave at night, he saw in a dream that the *śilā* was actually the tongue (*jihvā*) of Śrī Girirājajī. He also received an order to worship the *śilā* according to proper rules. He had a temple constructed near the entrance of Śrī Govindadevajī Mandira and arranged for the *śilā* to be worshipped there. This same *śilā* can be seen there today. After this event, Śrī Dāsa Gosvāmī stopped taking bath with the water of Gopī Kūpa, and had a new well constructed on the eastern bank of Lalitā Kuṇḍa for taking bath. This well remains there today.

Proceeding from this well, one arrives at the *kuṣja* of Narahari Sarakāra. Lalitā Kuṇḍa is situated on the location of Lalitānandada Kuṣja. Viśākhā Kuṇḍa and many other *kuṇḍas* are included within Lalitā Kuṇḍa but many of them have disappeared. Then come the temples of Śrī Rādhā-Vinodavīhārījī and Śrī Sītānāthajī. Near Lagmohana Kuṇḍa, on the *parikramā* path, lies the *samādhi* of Śrī Rājendra Gosvāmī. He gave up his life at this place absorbed in separation from Kṛṣṇa.

Śrī Rādhā-Kuṣjavīhārī Gauḍīya Maṭha

On the western side of Śrī Rādhā Kuṇḍa is Śrī Rādhā-Kuṣjavīhārī Gauḍīya Maṭha. The deities here, Śrī Rādhā-Kuṣjavīhārījī, were installed by *jagadguru paramahansa parivrājakācārya-varya om viṣṇupāda* Śrī Śrīmad Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Gosvāmī Prabhupāda, who propagated pure *vaiṣṇava dharma* and *śrī-harināma-saṅkīrtana* as practised and preached by Śrīman Mahāprabhu throughout the world. A little further away from the *samādhi-pīṭha* of Śrī Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī is the *bhajana-kuṭī* of Śrīla Saccidānanda Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura, renowned as 'the Seventh Gosvāmī', and of Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Gosvāmī.

Śivakhora

When coming to the village of Śrī Rādhā Kuṇḍa from Uddhava Kuṇḍa, this place is situated on the right-hand side of the *parikramā* path at the entrance to the village. It is said that in ancient times a lost she-jackal wandered to this place during the day, but the dogs here killed her. Seeing this, the villagers performed her last rites at this place and were struck with wonder to see a *kiśorī gopī* manifest from the she-jackal's body and ascend into the sky. It is said that a *jīva* who dies at Śrī Rādhā Kuṇḍa attains Goloka Vṛndāvana.

Mālyahāriṇī Kuṇḍa

This *kuṇḍa* is situated on the western side of Rādhā Kuṇḍa. Sitting in a *mādhavī kuṣja* here, Śrīmatī Rādhikājī strung necklaces of pearls. Śrī Dāsa Gosvāmī has described this *līlā* very beautifully in his book *Muktā-carita*.

Once, during the month of Kārtika on the occasion of the Dīpāvalī festival at Girirāja-Govardhana, the Brajabāsīs were busily absorbed in decorating their cows with various kinds of ornaments. The *gopīs* were bringing various ornaments from their homes to decorate the cows. Śrī Rādhikājī and Her girlfriends were sitting on the *mādhavī* terrace near Mālyahāriṇī Kuṇḍa making several kinds of beautiful pearl ornaments. Meanwhile, having heard of Śrīmatī Rādhikā's activities from the mouth of the *śuka* Vicakṣaṇa, Śrī Kṛṣṇa arrived there and asked for some pearls. However, Śrī Rādhikājī and Her *gopī* friends refused, proudly giving several reasons why they could not do so. Nonetheless, Śrī Kṛṣṇa insisted, "*Sakhīs!* If you cannot give Me a large quantity of pearls, then at least give Me a few, with which I can decorate My beloved cows Hamsinī and Hariṇī." But the headstrong *gopīs* rejected this request also. Lalitājī collected a palmful of pearls of the very finest quality and held them out to Kṛṣṇa, tauntingly saying, "Kṛṣṇa! These pearls which You want to use to decorate Your cows are not ordinary. They are very precious. Do You understand?"

Disappointed, Śrī Kṛṣṇa returned home where He sulkily took some pearls from mother Yaśodā. He then dug holes in the soil near the bank of the Yamunā, put manure in them and planted the pearls. He also fenced the area to protect the growing plants from animals and birds. Daily, Śrī Kṛṣṇa irrigated the field with a large quantity of cow-milk. For this, He had asked the *gopīs* to donate some milk but they refused this request as well.

To everyone's complete amazement, within two or three days all the pearls began to sprout. These plants grew right before everyone's eyes and began to bear pearl fruits, from which extremely beautiful pearls were produced in abundance. When the *gopīs* went to the bank of the Yamunā to fetch water, they saw this astonishing field of pearls and started to whisper among themselves. Śrī Kṛṣṇa happily harvested a huge quantity of pearls, brought them home and placed them in the lap of His mother. "Kanhaiyā! Where did You get such excellent pearls?" she asked in amazement. Śrī Kṛṣṇa then told her the whole story.

Śrī Kṛṣṇa and the *sakhās* now began stringing uncount-able pearl necklaces for all their cows, and, decorated with these pearl necklaces, these cows began to wander everywhere. Unable to tolerate this, the *gopīs* secretly brought pearls from their respective homes and began to sow them as Śrī Kṛṣṇa had done. They also irrigated the field with an abundance of cow's milk. Their pearls also sprouted but, to their surprise, only into thorny creepers. Seeing this, the *gopīs* became very worried. They narrated this whole incident to Śrī Kṛṣṇa and asked Him for some of His pearls, but Kṛṣṇa, the crown-jewel of *rasikas*, scornfully rejected their request. Finally, He asked to be able to feel the touch of their bodies and enjoy their embraces and kisses in exchange for His pearls.

Mālyahārīṇī Kuṇḍa received its name by virtue of the confidential *līlā* that took place here. To become more familiar with this *līlā*, one should study the book *Mukta-caritā*, in which Śrī Dāsa Gosvāmī very beautifully describes the intricacies of this pastime. The confidential realizations of *mahā-bhagavatas* in *samādhi* are completely true and transcendental.

Famous ghāṭas of Śrī Rādhā Kuṇḍa & Śrī Śyāma Kuṇḍa

1) Śrī Govinda Ghāṭa - This *ghāṭa* is situated on the eastern bank of Śrī Rādhā Kuṇḍa and lies between the *bhajana-kuṭī* of Śrī Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmī and the temple of Bihārījī. It is at this *ghāṭa* that Śrī Sanātana Gosvāmī saw Śrīmatī Rādhikā playing on a swing and realised in his heart the secret of the phrase *veṇī-vyālaṅgaṇā-phaṇā* in Śrī Rūpa Gosvāmī's *Cāṭu-puṣpāṣjali*.

2) Śrī Mānasa Pāvana Ghāṭa - This *ghāṭa* is situated on the north-western side of Śyāma Kuṇḍa and is very dear to Śrīmatī Rādhikā.

3) Paśca Pāṇḍava Ghāṭa - This *ghāṭa* is joined to Mānasa Ghāṭa in the northern part of Śrī Śyāma Kuṇḍa. The five Pāṇḍavas in the form of trees disclosed themselves to Śrī Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī above this *ghāṭa*. Here, at the entrance door of the Śrī Gadādhara-Caitanya Mandira, is also an old *choharā* tree, which disclosed itself to Śrī Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura to be a *brāhmaṇa* from Kāśī.

4) Madhumaṅgala Ghāṭa - Above this *ghāṭa* is Śrī Madhu-maṅgalajī's *kuṣja*, named Madhumaṅgalānandada, which he offered to Śrī Lalitā Sakhī. The *baiṭhaka* of Hitahari-varṁśa Gosvāmī is here.

5) Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī Ghāṭa - A little up from this place is Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī's *bhajana-kuṭī*. During his stay here, Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī daily took bath at this *ghāṭa*.

6) Gayā Ghāṭa - Another name for this *ghāṭa* is Dhana-mādhava-gherā Ghāṭa. Just past this *ghāṭa* is Śrī Mādhavendra Purī's *baiṭhaka* and Śrī Harirāma Vyāsajī's place of *bhajana*.

7) Aṣṭa-sakhī kā Ghāṭa - This is the *ghāṭa* of the eight *sakhīs* and lies between Gayā Ghāṭa and Tamāla Talā.

8) Tamāla Talā Ghāṭa – This *ghāṭa* lies on the southern bank of Śyāma Kuṇḍa. Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu sat under the *tamāla* tree here and inquired about both *kuṇḍas* from the villagers, who could offer Him no information. Instead, they pointed out Kālī and Gaurī Khet nearby. Mahāprabhu declared these two fields to be Rādhā Kuṇḍa and Śyāma Kuṇḍa and took bath in them. This is how He manifested Śrī Rādhā Kuṇḍa and Śrī Śyāma Kuṇḍa, which had been established by Mahārāja Vajranābha for the benefit of the world. Later, Śrī Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī reconstructed them as we see them today.

9) Śrī Vallabha Ghāṭa – This *ghāṭa* is situated west of Tamāla Talā on the southern bank of Śyāma Kuṇḍa. Śrī Vallabhācārya sat in the shade of a *choharā* tree here with his associates and glorified both *kuṇḍas*. He remained here for some time and would bathe at this *ghāṭa* daily. He would also recite *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* here.

10) Śrī Madana-Mohana Ghāṭa – South of this *ghāṭa* is the temple of Śrī Madana-Mohanajī.

11) Saṅgama Ghāṭa – This *ghāṭa* is situated between Rādhā Kuṇḍa and Śyāma Kuṇḍa. The two *kuṇḍas* meet under this platform. *Saṅgama* means ‘meeting’. This is the Yogapīṭha of the eternal pastimes of Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa. Vaiṣṇavas first take bath in Śrī Rādhā Kuṇḍa and then in Śrī Śyāma Kuṇḍa. It is said that there was an old *tamāla* tree here that disclosed itself to one devotee to be Agasta Ṛṣi.

12) Rāsavādī Ghāṭa – This *ghāṭa* is situated in the southern part of Śrī Rādhā Kuṇḍa. It is the location of a *śrī rāsa-maṇḍala*.

13) Jhūlana Ghāṭa – At this *ghāṭa*, which lies on the western bank of Śrī Rādhā Kuṇḍa, Śrī Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa used to swing (*jhūlā jhūlanā*). Even today, the *braja-ramaṇīs* of Rādhā Kuṇḍa swing with great festivity here. Another name for this *ghāṭa* is Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa Ghāṭa.

14) Śrī Jāhnavā Ghāṭa – This *ghāṭa* lies on Rādhā Kuṇḍa’s northern bank and is the bathing-place of Śrī Jāhnavā Ṭhākuraṇī, the wife of Śrī Nityānanda Prabhu. Śrī Jāhnavā Ṭhākuraṇī also used to perform *bhajana* here. Her *baiṭhaka* remains here to this day.

15) Śrī Bajranābha Kuṇḍa – This *kuṇḍa* is situated in the middle of Śrī Kṛṣṇa Kuṇḍa.

16) Śrī Kaṅkaṇa Kuṇḍa – This *kuṇḍa* was built by Śrī Rādhājī with the help of Her *sakhīs* using their bracelets (*kaṅkaṇa*). It is situated in the very middle of Śrī Rādhā Kuṇḍa.

The rāsa-maṇḍalas of Śrī Rādhā Kuṇḍa

1) South of Śrī Rādhā Kuṇḍa, where a *rāsa-maṇḍala* pavilion has been constructed

2) North-east of Śrī Rādhā Kuṇḍa, behind Govinda Mandira

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- 3) In the northern part of the village, south of Bhānukhora
 - 4) In the northern part of Śrī Śyāma Kuṇḍa, north of Rādhā-Vallabha Ghāṭa
 - 5) In Nandinī-gherā
 - 6) In Lalita-Vihārījī

The kṣetra-pālas of Śrī Rādhā Kuṇḍa

Śrī Rādhā Kuṇḍa has seven *kṣetra-pālas*, or area-protectors:

- 1) Kuṇḍeśvara Mahādeva on the south-western side of Śrī Rādhā Kuṇḍa
- 2) Mahādeva in the west of the village, north of Śivakhora
- 3) Mahādeva in Śrī Rādhā-Ramaṇa Mandira
- 4) Mahādeva on the northern side of Śrī Śyāma Kuṇḍa
- 5) Bankhaṇḍī Mahādeva on the south-eastern side of Śrī Śyāma Kuṇḍa
- 6) Mahīmeśvara Mahādeva at Mālyahārīṇī Kuṇḍa
- 7) Mahādeva in the western part of Vallabhācārya's *baiṭhaka*

Chapter 7

Śrī Govardhana

Girirāja-Govardhana is situated some fourteen miles west of Mathurā. Śrī Kṛṣṇa protected Braja by holding the enormous Girirājajī on the little finger of His left hand for seven days, thus shattering the pride of Indra. Girirāja has descended from Śrī Kṛṣṇa's *aprākṛta* Goloka Vṛndāvana Dhāma to Braja on the earth planet. He came with secluded *nikuṣjas*, caves, pure *sarovaras*, and various minerals, like *gairika* (red ochre), that are useful in the *sevā* of Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa Yugala. Girirāja-Govardhana is non-different from Kṛṣṇa in *tattva*, yet he is considered to be *hari-dāsa-varya*, the best among all the servants of Hari. The *gopīs* have addressed him as follows:

*hantāyam adrīr abalā hari-dāsa-varyo
yad rāma-kṛṣṇa-caraṇa-sparśa-pramodaḥ
mānaṁ tanotī saha-go-gaṇayos tayor yat
pānīya-sūyavasa-kandara-kandamūlaiḥ*

(Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 10.21.18)

“O my friends, this Girirāja is the topmost among Śrī Hari's servants and is absorbed in supreme bliss, always being touched by Śrī Balarāma and Śrī Kṛṣṇa's lotus feet. Girirāja serves and satisfies Śrī Kṛṣṇa, Balarāma, the cowherd boys and the cows by providing them with water from his pure *sarovaras*, lush grass, fruits, roots, and various minerals like *gairika*.”

The Appearance of Śrī Govardhana in Braja

According to the *Ādi Varāha Purāṇa*, during the advent of Rāmacandra, the monkeys and bears all brought large rocks and stones from many places to construct a bridge across the ocean. On the order of Śrī Rāmacandrajī, Hanumānjī was carrying Govardhana to the ocean, having uprooted him from

Uttarāṣcala, when he heard a divine sound that announced, “The ocean bridge is now complete; therefore, no more rocks are required.”

Hearing this, Hanumānjī became sad and put Śrī Giri-rājājī down here, where he stands today. Girirājājī also became very unhappy and said to Hanumānjī, “You have deprived me of the touch of Śrī Rāma’s lotus feet. I will curse you.”

Hanumānjī replied, “Please forgive me. In the next Dvāpara-yuga, your desire will be fulfilled. At that time, Svayaṁ Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa will stop the worship of Indra and worship you instead. Angered, Indra will try to destroy Braja by unleashing his *vajra* (thunderbolt) and by sending torrential rains. At this time, Śrī Kṛṣṇa will hold you on His hand to protect Braja and thus fulfil your desire.” Saying this, Hanumānjī leapt into the air and arrived at Śrī Rāmacandrajī’s side by the aerial pathways.

After narrating the whole incident to Him, Śrī Rāmacandrajī said, “All these rocks, which have been assembled to build the bridge, have been delivered by the touch of My feet. But I shall fulfil the desires of Govardhana by holding him on My hand and touching him with My whole body. At the close of Dvāpara-yuga, I shall take birth in the dynasty of the Yadus and make Govardhana famous as the best *haridāsa* by herding the cows with My *sakhās* on his slopes and by enjoying with My beloved *gopīs* in his *kuṣjas*.”

The *Garga Saṁhita* relates the following history from a different *kalpa* about the appearance of Govardhana in Braja.

Once, in the course of his wanderings, Pulastya Ṛṣi reached Droṇācala Hill. The son of Droṇācala, Govardhana, was very beautiful, fragrant, smooth, and full of luxuriant, green trees and creepers. Pulastya Ṛṣi desired to bring this Govardhana to his place of residence, Kāśī, because there was no such hill in Kāśī on which he could peacefully perform his *sādhana-bhajana*. He asked Droṇācala to give his son Govardhana to him for this purpose. The father Droṇācala could not refuse, as he feared being cursed. Govardhana agreed to go, but on the condition that if Pulastya put him down somewhere along the way, he would remain there and not move again. The *ṛṣi* accepted his condition, and by mystic power kept Govardhana on his palm as he proceeded to Kāśī.

As they reached Braja, thoughts of Śrī Kṛṣṇa’s future *līlās* entered Govardhana’s mind, and he became so heavy that the *ṛṣi* could no longer carry him and was forced to put him down right there. After the *ṛṣi* took bath, performed his *sandhyā-vandana*, took food and rested, he tried to lift Girirāja again, but Girirāja refused to move – remaining true to his previous condition. The *ṛṣi* could not lift Govardhana, even when he employed all his power. Finally, in great anger, he cursed Govardhana, saying, “You will diminish in size by one sesame seed daily.” Govardhanajī happily accepted this curse, because he knew about the coming descent of Svayaṁ Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa. “Śyāma-sundara will perform various *līlās* on me, and I shall be blessed,” he thought.

Girirāja does, in fact, diminish in size every day, but who can say whether this is due to the *ṛṣi*'s curse or due to separation from Śrī Kṛṣṇa?

Pastime-places on the Govardhana Parikramā

Śrī Rādhā Kuṇḍa and Śrī Śyāma Kuṇḍa are the two eyes of Girirāja Śrī Govardhana, and therefore the best part of his body. The places of *kṛṣṇa-līlā* mentioned below are in sequence as they appear on the Girirāja *parikramā* starting from Śrī Rādhā Kuṇḍa and Śrī Śyāma Kuṇḍa.

Mukharāī

This place lies one mile south of Rādhā Kuṇḍa, along the road to Vṛndāvana. It is where Mukharājī, the old maternal grandmother of Rādhājī, resides. When Yaśodājī was a baby, Mukharājī breast-fed her. Grandmother Mukharā later joyfully arranged secret meetings between Śrī Yugala Kīśora-Kīśorī. She is the mother-in-law of Mahārāja Vṛṣabhānu and the mother of Kirtikā Maiyā. The Brajabāsīs used to address her as Baḍhāī. With great eagerness, she would take *darśana* of Śrīmatī Rādhikā and Kṛṣṇa every morning. One can have *darśana* of Mukharā-devī at this place.

Ratna Simhāsana

Ratna Simhāsana lies one mile south of Kusuma Sarovara on the Govardhana *parikramā* path coming from Śrī Rādhā Kuṇḍa. The following pastime took place here. On the full moon day after Śiva Caturdāśī (Śiva-rātri), Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Śrī Balarāma were playing Holī with the *gopīs* using syringes to squirt each other with water of many colours. The sweet music of *mṛdaṅgas*, cymbals, *vīṇas* and other instruments in *vāsantī rāga* and other melodious *rāgas* filled the air. Śrīmatī Rādhikājī sat down on the nearby *ratna simhāsana* (jewelled throne). At that time, a servant of Kuvera named Śaṅkhacuḍa, who considered Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa to be an ordinary human being, tried to abduct these extremely beautiful *gopīs*. In voices full of distress, the *gopīs* began calling out, “Rāma! Kṛṣṇa!” Kṛṣṇa ran to the call of the *gopīs* with great speed and killed Śaṅkhacuḍa. He took the jewel from the demon’s forehead and gave it to Śrī Balarāma, who sent it to Śrīmatī Rādhikā through Dhaniṣṭhā. This is the place where Rādhikājī sat on the *ratna simhāsana*.

Śyāma Kuṭī

This place is situated amidst a thick cluster of trees near Ratna Simhāsana. Here Śrī Śyāmasundara smeared His body with *śyāma*-coloured *kastūrī* (musk), dressed Himself in *śyāma*-coloured clothes and ornaments, and entered a *śyāma*-coloured *nikuṣja*. Even the *gopīs* were unable to recognise Him. When the *gopīs* finally did recognise Him, He performed many attractive *līlās* with them. A *bājanī-śīla*, which emits sweet sounds when tapped, is nearby.

Gvāla Pokharā

Beautiful, thick trees and creepers surround this charming pastime-place near Śyāma Kuṭī. At the time of cowherding, Śrī Kṛṣṇa used to rest here at noon. The young cowherd boys (*gvāla-bālas*) lovingly served Kṛṣṇa in *sakhya-rasa* and playfully snatched things away from each other. These and other sweet, charming pastimes have made this Bāla Pokharā (Gvāla Pokharā) very famous.

Śrī Kṛṣṇa, in the guise of a young priest, performed Śrīmatī Rādhikā's Sūrya-pūjā at Sūrya Kuṇḍa with Baṭu Madhu-maṅgala. After completing the *pūjā*, they sat down here with the *sakhās*. Madhumaṅgala was carrying *manohara laḍḍūs* and a gold ring, which he had received as *dakṣiṇā*. He had painstakingly tied them in his cloth, and was guarding them vigilantly. The mischievous Balarāma asked Madhumaṅgala, "*Bhaiyā* Madhumaṅgala! What's in this bundle of yours?"

"Nothing." Madhumaṅgala hesitatingly answered. Baladevajī signalled to the *sakhās*, some of whom caught hold of Madhumaṅgala's two hands. One *sakhā* covered Madhumaṅgala's eyes with his palms, and another forcibly snatched the bundle from his hands. Laughing loudly, they shared the *laḍḍūs* amongst themselves and proceeded to eat them right in front of Madhumaṅgala. In this com-motion, Madhumaṅgala's cloth loosened. He became very angry and held out his sacred thread, ready to curse Balarāma, Śrīdhāma and the other *sakhās*. Somehow or other Kṛṣṇa pacified him, and finally Madhumaṅgala, also beginning to laugh, asked the *sakhās* for some of the remaining crumbs.

This Gvāla Pokharā still carries reminders of these *līlās*. While doing *parikramā* of Girirāja-Govardhana, Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu took rest here for a short time and remembered these pastimes.

Killola Kuṇḍa

This *kuṇḍa* lies near Gvāla Pokharā to the south. *Killola* means 'sport' or 'frolic'. As its name suggests, this *kuṇḍa* is where Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa Yugala played in the water. Kṛṣṇa and His *sakhās* also enjoyed playful sports here.

Kusuma Sarovara

This *sarovara* is situated on the right-hand side of the *parikramā* path, about one and a half miles south-west of Śrī Rādhā Kuṇḍa. A *kusuma-vana*, or forest of flowers, was here full of varieties of trees, creepers and flowers like *belī*, *camelī*, *jūhī*, *yūthī*, *mallikā* and *campaka*. Śrīmatī Rādhikā used to come here on the pretext of picking flowers with Her girl-friends, but Her real intent was to meet *rasika* Śrī Kṛṣṇa, with whom She would have love-quarrels (*keli-kalaha*) and sarcastic exchanges full of *rasa*.

Kṛṣṇa-bhāvanāmṛta describes how one day Śrīmatī Rādhikā was picking flowers here with Her girlfriends when Kṛṣṇa arrived. The following exchange then took place between Them:

Kṛṣṇa: Who is there?

Rādhājī: Nobody!

Kṛṣṇa: Tell Me honestly, who are You?

Rādhājī: Nobody!

Kṛṣṇa: You are speaking in a very crooked way.

Rādhājī: And You speak in a very straight way, don't You?

Kṛṣṇa: I am asking You who You are.

Rādhājī: Don't You know?

Kṛṣṇa: What are You doing?

Rādhājī: Picking flowers for Sūrya-pūjā.

Kṛṣṇa: Have You received permission from anyone?

Rādhājī: I don't need anyone's permission.

Kṛṣṇa: *Aho!* I have caught a thief today. I was wondering who was completely ruining our garden by stealing flowers. Today I have apprehended You and will immediately punish You.

Rādhājī: Since when have You become the owner of this flower garden? Have You ever sown a single plant here? Have You ever even watered one? On the con-trary, You ruin this *kusuma-vana* with Your hundreds and thousands of cows and wild, insolent friends. Indeed, since when have You become the caretaker of this garden?

Kṛṣṇa: Don't defame a pious, righteous person like Me. Now I shall teach You a good lesson.

Rādhājī (smilingly): Aha-ha! You are a highly pious and righteous person, are You? You killed a woman right after Your birth; You lied to Your mother even in childhood; You stole butter from the houses of the neighbouring *gopīs*; and when You became a little older, You stole the clothes of the young *gopa* girls. Only a few days ago You killed a calf. This is the extent of Your pious, saintly conduct.

Hearing the retort, Kṛṣṇa scratched His head and looked towards clever Madhumaṅgala, who advised Him, "One's wellbeing lies in remaining quiet." At this point, all the *sakhīs* surrounded Śyāmasundara and began to clap. The following pastime also took place here. One morning, Śrīmatī Rādhikā and Her *sakhīs* arrived on the bank of Kusuma Sarovara to pick the fragrant flowers that bloomed here in abundance, such as *belī*, *camelī*, *jūhī*, *kanera* and *campaka*. Seeing a branch full of flowers, Śrīmatī Rādhikā pulled it down with one hand and started picking its flowers with the other. Knowing that Śrīmatī Rādhikā was coming to Kusuma Sarovara to pick flowers, playful Kṛṣṇa had climbed that tree and had stationed Himself on that very branch. Using all His weight to push that branch down, He had hidden Himself in the foliage so that Śrīmatījī would not see Him. Śrīmatī Rādhikā became absorbed in picking flowers from that branch when Kṛṣṇa suddenly shifted to another branch. At once, the first branch sprung up, lifting up Śrīmatī Rādhikā with it. The startled Śrīmatī Rādhikā cried out for help. Śrī Kṛṣṇa immediately leapt from the tree and caught the hanging Śrīmatījī in His arms. Seeing this, the *sakhīs* began clapping and laughing loudly; but Śrīmatī

Rādhikājī, having released Herself from Kṛṣṇa's embrace, began to scold Him.

In modern times, this *kusuma-vana* has been completely ruined. Javāhara Singh, the *mahārāja* of Bharatapura, looted the treasury of Delhi in 1767 A.D. and with that money built beautiful concrete *ghāṭas* with stairs at Kusuma Sarovara. To the west of the *sarovara* is the tomb of Rājā Sūrajamala flanked by the tombs of his two queens. Nearby is the temple of Dāūjī.

Nārada Kuṇḍa

About four hundred metres south-east of Kusuma Sarovara is Nārada Kuṇḍa, where Nāradaḥ performed *tapasyā*, or penance. After Nāradaḥ heard the glories of the supreme *gopī-bhāva* from the mouth of Vṛndā-devī, the *adhiṣṭhātrī-devī* of Vṛndāvana, a very intense desire to serve Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa Yugala in the form of a *gopī* in *premamayī unnatojjvala-sevā* arose in his heart. He received the *gopāla-mantra* from Brahmā, the grandsire of the world, and began to perform *sādhana-bhajana* in *rāga-mārga* here under the guidance of the *gopīs*.

After performing worship for many *yugas*, Yogamāyā Paurṇamāsī dipped Nāradaḥ in Kusuma Sarovara, by which he received the body of a *gopī*. Thereafter, he received the *ekadāśa-bhāva* of *rāga-mārga* and obtained the qualification to perform *sevā* of the Divine Couple. It is highly beneficial to have *darśana* of this Nārada Kuṇḍa.

Pāleī

This village lies one and a half miles east of Nārada Kuṇḍa, near the Mathurā Road. The Yamunā used to sometimes flow here. Even today, if one digs up the soil, one will find Yamunā sand. Kṛṣṇa herded the cows with the *sakhās* at this place, and also had many kinds of amorous exchanges with the *sakhīs*. This is also where the poet Kumbhanadāsajī of Aṣṭachāpa resided. The *sarovara* and *gośālā* here, which are named after him, are well known.

Mānasī Gaṅgā

Driven by the *gopīs'* insistence that He atone for the sin of killing a bull (Vṛṣabhāsura), Śrī Kṛṣṇa created Mānasī Gaṅgā by His mind. He became pure by taking bath in its waters. According to a second story, Śrī Nanda Mahārāja, Śrī Yaśodā and the other *gopas* and *gopīs* once took Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma with them on a pilgrimage to the Gaṅgā to take bath. At night, they rested near Govardhana. Kṛṣṇa wondered why they should all travel so far when all the *tīrthas* in fact reside in Braja itself. In His mind, He summoned Gaṅgā-devī, and at once Bhagavatī Bhāgīrathī Gaṅgā's strong current reached this spot, making a sweet sound. Śrī Gaṅgā-devī was mounted on an alligator, and Nanda, Yaśodā, and the *gopas*, *gopīs* and other Brajabāsīs became astonished to have her *darśana*. Kṛṣṇa said, "All the *tīrthas* exist in Braja. You all wanted to bathe in the Gaṅgā, and thus Gaṅgā-devī has personally appeared before you today. Don't delay; take bath in her

waters now!" Gaṅgā-devī appeared here on the Amāvasyā of Kārtika on the day of Dīpāvalī. Large numbers of faithful people therefore bathe here on the day of Dīpāvalī and take *darśana* of Śrī Haridevājī. They also offer *ghee* lamps from all sides of Mānasī Gaṅgā and near Śrī Girirāja-Govardhana.

According to a third story, Kṛṣṇa used to sport in the Yamunā, sometimes with His *sakhās* and sometimes with His beloved *gopīs*. Beholding this great fortune of her younger sister Yamunā, Bhagavatī Gaṅgā became overwhelmed by a strong desire to also serve Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa Yugala. She expressed her heart's desire to her younger sister Yamunā and requested her help. Kṛṣṇapriyā Śrī Yamunājī then entreated her beloved Kṛṣṇa to bestow His mercy on her elder sister, Gaṅgā-devī. Thus, at an appropriate time, Śrī Kṛṣṇa summoned Gaṅgājī to Braja and blessed her by frolicking in her waters with the *gopīs*.

The stone *ghāṭas* at Mānasī Gaṅgā were built by Rājā Bhagavān Dāsa, the father of Mānasingh, the king of Jaipura.

Śrī Harideva

Śrī Haridevājī, the presiding deity of Girirāja-Govardhana, is present on the southern bank of Mānasī Gaṅgā. Śrī Kṛṣṇa took one form as Giridhāri and held His second form, Girirājājī, on His palm. The *līlā* of lifting Govardhana (Govardhana-dhāraṇa) will be described later, when we come to Ānyora Gaon.

Brahma Kuṇḍa

Seeing that Kṛṣṇa was in a good mood, Brahmājī came to this place to seek forgiveness for his *aparādha* of stealing away the calves and cowherd boys. He performed *abhiṣeka* of Śrī Kṛṣṇa here and glorified Him with *mantras* from the *Sāma Veda*. The holy water from the *abhiṣeka* was called Brahma Kuṇḍa, and Brahmājī took bath in it along with the other demigods.

Manasā-devī

This temple is situated on the southern bank of Mānasī Gaṅgā, above Brahma Kuṇḍa. Manasā-devī is nobody else but Māyā-devī (Yogamāyā) herself. One receives the qualification to serve Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa Yugala only by the mercy of Yogamāyā Paurṇamāsījī. Some Vaiṣṇavas also address Mānasī Gaṅgā devī simply as Manasā-devī.

Go Ghāṭa

Śrī Kṛṣṇa used to bring the cows and calves (*go*) to this *ghāṭa* to drink water.

Cakra Tīrtha

This place is situated north of Mānasī Gaṅgā. Cakreśvara Mahādeva, currently known as Cakaleśvara, resides here. When Indra poured torrential rains over Braja, Mahādeva (who is Sadaśiva, and therefore *viṣṇu-tattva*) served Girirāja and the Brajabāsīs by holding his trident up like a *cakra* and protecting them. (Some devotees declare that it was on Mahādevājī's

request that Sudarśana Cakra protected Girirāja-Govardhana and Braja, and that hence Mahādeva's name is Cakreśvara Mahādeva.)

The *ghāṭa* on which Cakreśvarajī presides is also called Pāraṅga Ghāṭa. The *gopīs* used to cross Mānasī Gaṅgā from here. Śrī Kṛṣṇa would act as a boatman and enjoy boating-pastimes (*nauka-vilāsa*) and other *līlās* while ferrying the *gopīs* across Bhagavatī Mānasī Gaṅgā. Śrīla Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura has given a very touching description of this *nauka-vilāsa-līlā* in his prayer *Śrī Govardhanāṣṭakam* (text 7):

*yatraiva gaṅgām anu nāvi rādhām
ārohya madhye tu nimagna-naukaḥ
kṛṣṇo hi rādhānugalo babhau sa
govardhano me diṣatām abhīṣṭam*

“In the middle of Mānasī Gaṅgā, Śrīmatī Rādhikā was sitting in Kṛṣṇa's boat. Kṛṣṇa, dressed like the boatman, tried to sink the boat, and the terrified Rādhikā caught Śrī Kṛṣṇa in Her embrace. May that Śrī Govardhana fulfil all my desires.”

Śrī Sanātana Gosvāmī's bhajana-kuṭī

At Cakra Tīrtha, opposite Cakaleśvara Mahādeva, is Śrī Sanātana Gosvāmī's *bhajana-kuṭī*. Sanātana Gosvāmī sometimes resided here to perform *bhajana*, but being disturbed by its bothersome mosquitoes, he considered moving elsewhere. At that time, Cakaleśvara Mahādeva arrived there in the guise of a *brahmāṇa* and requested him, “Bābājī, please do not move elsewhere. Stay here and freely perform your *bhajana*. From today, the mosquitoes will no longer trouble you.” Mosquitoes have not caused a disturbance here since. Sanātana Gosvāmī remained here for some time, and was able to perform his *bhajana* untroubled.

Śrī Sanātana Gosvāmī used to perform *parikramā* of Govardhana every day, even in his old age. Once, while doing *parikramā* in the heat of summer, the soil under his feet was burning hot. Weary and drenched with sweat, Gosvāmījī sat down, but there was no shade to be found. Suddenly, a cowherd boy came and held a yellow shawl over Sanātana to give him shade. With the other corner of the shawl, He started fanning Gosvāmījī's face. Sanātana Gosvāmī's whole body became cool and calm by the touch of that boy, who said in a very sweet voice, “Bābā! In this old age there is no need for you to perform *parikramā* of Govardhana and undergo so much hardship. I am giving you a *śilā* of Girirājajī that is marked with the stick and lotus feet of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Perform *parikramā* of this *śilā* every day and you will receive the same benefit as doing Govardhana *parikramā*.” Saying this, the boy gave the *śilā* to Sanātana Gosvāmī and disappeared. This boy was none other than Giridhārī, the lifter of Girirāja. This *śilā* used to reside in the temple of Śrī Rādhā-Dāmodara in Vṛndāvana, but nowadays it is in the temple of Śrī Rādhā-Dāmodara in Jaipura. The *pratibhū-vigraha* of this *śilā* is present in the Śrī Rādhā-Dāmodara Mandira in Vṛndāvana. One easily

receives the result of performing *parikramā* of Girirāja-Govardhana by circumambulating Śrī Rādhā-Dāmodara Mandira four times.

There is a temple of Śrī Gaura-Nityānanda Prabhu opposite the temple of Cakaleśvara. While performing *parikramā* of Govardhana, Śrī Nityānanda Prabhu and later Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu had *darśana* of Śrī Cakleśvara Mahādeva and Pāraṅga Ghāṭa at Mānasī Gaṅgā. They also took rest here.

Mukhāravinda

On the northern bank of Mānasī Gaṅgā is the *mukhāra-vinda* (lotus face) of Śrī Govardhanajī. Govardhana's form is that of a sitting cow. His hind part is Pūcharī, or Pūṣcharī. He has turned his neck to place his lotus face near his stomach, which is the town of Govardhana. His two eyes are Rādhā Kuṇḍa and Śyāma Kuṇḍa. There is a beautiful temple here with a *śilā* of Girirāja's *mukhāravinda*. He is given *abhiṣeka*, *pūjā* and offerings of *bhoga* every day, and festivals are also organised on Annakūṭa and Dīpāvalī.

Indradhvaja Vedī

This place is situated east of Govardhana. Previously, Indra *pūjā* was performed here, but Śrī Kṛṣṇa changed the form of this worship and conducted Govardhana *pūjā* instead.

Ṛṇa Mochana and Pāpa Mochana Kuṇḍa

These two *kuṇḍas* used to lie south-east of Govardhana near Indradhvaja Vedī, next to the present bus station, but today they have disappeared. One *kuṇḍa* has been filled with dirt, and an electricity office has been built over it. Houses and shops have been erected over the other *kuṇḍa*.

Dāna Ghāṭī

This place is situated in the middle of Govardhana on the present-day road between Mathurā and Kāmyavana. Even today, a toll must be paid to cross through here. At the time of *kṛṣṇa-līlā*, Kṛṣṇa became a toll collector (*dānī*) and performed *dāna-līlā* with the *gopīs* through loving quarrels (*prema-kalaha*) and sarcastic remarks. This *līlā* has been beautifully described in *Dāna-kelī-kaumudī*, *Dāna-kelī-cintāmaṇi* and the other books of the Gauḍīya Gosvāmīs.

Once, on the bank of Govinda Kuṇḍa, Śrī Bhāgurī Ṛṣi was performing a *yajña* for the pleasure of Bhagavān. The *gopas* and *gopīs* were bringing ingredients for the *yajña* from distant places. From the other side of Dāna Ghāṭī, Śrīmatī Rādhikā and Her *sakhīs* were also bringing yoghurt, milk, butter, *rabaḍī*, and many other kinds of milk-sweets. Śrī Kṛṣṇa, along with Subala, Madhumaṅgala and other *sakhās*, obstructed the path and forcibly demanded *dāna* (toll), and the *sakhās* and *gopīs* began to taunt each other with sarcastic remarks.

Standing in His *tribhaṅga-lalita* form, Śrī Kṛṣṇa asked mischievously, "What are you carrying?"

“Milk, yoghurt and butter for the *yajña* of Bhāgūrī Ṛṣi,” the *gopīs* replied. Hearing the word ‘butter’, Madhumaṅgala’s mouth started to water. He promptly said, “Quickly pay the *dāna* and move on.”

Lalitā, filled with sarcasm, asked, “What *dāna*? We have never paid any *dāna* before.”

But Śrī Kṛṣṇa was insistent. “You can pass only after paying *dāna*.”

Śrīmatījī asked Him, “Since when have You become the *dānī* here? Did You inherit this place from your father?”

“Don’t be so insolent!” He replied. “I am Vṛndāvaneśvara, the ruler of the kingdom of Vṛndāvana.”

“How is that?”

“Vṛndā is My wedded wife,” Kṛṣṇa asserted. “The property of the wife is also the property of the husband. Vṛndāvana is the kingdom of Vṛndā-devī, therefore it is My kingdom.”

“*Acchā?*” Lalitā answered haughtily. “We have never heard anything about this. Let us inquire from Vṛndājī about this right now.” At once, she turned towards Vṛndā and smilingly asked, “Vṛnde! Is this ‘black one’ your husband?”

Vṛndā flared up in disgust: “Never! We have no relation with this lying debauchee. Yes, this was my kingdom, but I have handed it over to Vṛndāvaneśvarī Śrīmatī Rādhikā.” All the *sakhīs* burst out laughing and Śrī Kṛṣṇa became a little embarrassed, but He was nonetheless determined to collect the *dāna*. After this *prema-kalaha*, or love-quarrel, the *gopīs* exchanged the *dāna* of *prema* at Dāna Nivartana Kuṇḍa, some distance from Dāna Ghāṭī. To find out more about this *līlā*, you can read *Dāna-kelī-kaumudī* and *Dāna-kelī-cintāmaṇi*.

Dāna Nivartana Kuṇḍa

The *gopīs* reclaimed their *dāna* from Kṛṣṇa at this place.

Parāsauli

This village lies about one and a quarter miles south-east of the town of Govardhana in the lowlands of Govardhana. During the Mughal reign, the Muslims changed the name of the village to Mahammadpura. This is where the *vāsantī rāsa-līlā* of Kṛṣṇa and His beloved *gopīs* took place. This *rāsa* continued for an entire night of Brahmājī, but it seemed that it was over in only a few moments. The moon in the sky had become stunned upon seeing this *rāsa-līlā*, and was unable to move the whole night. Because this *rāsa-līlā* took place in the light of a brilliant full moon, this place is also called Candra Sarovara, ‘Lake of the Moon’. In the south-western corner of the *sarovara* is Śṛṅgāra Mandira, where Kṛṣṇa personally decorated Śrīmatījī.

Near the *sarovara* under a *choṅkara* tree is the *baithaka* of Śrī Vallabhācārya. Sūradāsa’s *kuṭī* and *samādhi*, known simply as Sūra-kuṭī and Sūra-samādhi, are also situated within this area. Sūradāsa was a natural poet. His collection of poems is famous as *Sūra-sāgara* or *Sūra-padāvalī*. Sūradāsajī was blind,

yet he would compose poems with sweet, beautiful descriptions of the different *śṛṅgāras*, or outfits and decorations, of Śrī Nāthajī. One day, the *pujārī* did not dress Śrī Nāthajī, who remained completely naked. He opened the doors of the altar and asked Sūradāsa to quickly compose a poem describing His *śṛṅgāra*. Sūradāsa remained silent for a few moments, but the *pujārī* insisted. Sūradāsa laughed loudly and proceeded to sing, *Āj bhaye hari naṅgam naṅgā*. (“Today, Hari is undressed and naked.”) Everyone became stunned upon hearing his song.

Sūradāsa spent his last days in Parāsaulī. One day, Śrī Viṭṭhalācārya, the son of Śrī Vallabhācārya, asked him, “Sūra! What are you thinking about?” Sūradāsa then composed his last song: *Khaṣjan nain rūp ras mâte / atīśay cārū capal aniyāre pal piṣjarā na samāte*. (“Kṛṣṇa’s beautiful eyes are like *khaṣjana* birds, full of *rasa*, very restless, and slightly reddened due to intoxication. My life cannot remain in the cage of this body any longer.”) He then left his body. With tear-filled eyes, Śrī Viṭṭhalācārya said, “The boat of *puṣṭi-mārga* has departed today.”

In the south-eastern part of Parāsaulī is Saṅkarṣaṇa Kuṇḍa, on whose bank is a temple of Śrī Baladevajī.

Paīṭhā Grāma

This village is situated two miles south of Parāsaulī. When Śrī Kṛṣṇa disappeared from the *rāsa-sthalī* during *vāsantī rāsa*, the grief-stricken *gopīs* began searching for Him everywhere. Kṛṣṇa assumed a four-handed form at this place, but when the *gopīs* saw this form, they simply offered *praṇāma* and continued on their way. Śrīmatījī arrived a little later, searching for Kṛṣṇa, in separation. Beholding Śrīmatījī, Śrī Kṛṣṇa could no longer maintain His four-handed form, and two hands entered (*paīṭha gaye*) His body. He met Śrīmatījī in His form as an ever-fresh, youthful cowherd boy and expert dancer holding a flute in His hand. Śrī Kṛṣṇa begged forgiveness from Śrīmatījī. He said, “*Priye!* When I suddenly did not see You in the *rāsa*, I became aggrieved in separation from You and began searching for You. This *rāsa* is for You only. You should never go into *māna* and leave Me ever again.”

Thus, *vāsantī rāsa* has its own speciality, in which Śrīmatī Rādhikā’s superiority over the other *gopīs* is established. The poet Śrī Jayadeva Gosvāmī has described *vāsantī rāsa* in his *Gita-Govinda*. Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu gives *vāsantī rāsa* alone as proof of Śrīmatī Rādhikā’s pre-eminence. This subject has been described very sweetly in *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta* in the conversation between Śrī Rāya Rāmānanda and Mahāprabhu (*Rāya-Rāmānanda Saṁvad*). This place has a very special significance for the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas. Kṛṣṇa has many beloveds, but Śrīmatī Rādhikā is the crown-jewel of them all, because She is the embodiment of *mahābhāva* and the possessor of all good qualities. This is why Śrī Kṛṣṇa was able to maintain His four-handed form before the other

sakhīs, but could not maintain His *bhāva* upon seeing Śrīmatījī. His two extra arms entered (*paiṭha gaye*) into His body. This is the special glory of Rādhājī. Places that may be seen in Paiṭha are Nārāyaṇa Sarovara, Aiṇṭhā Kadamba, Khīra Sāgara, Balabhadra Kuṇḍa and others.

Bacha Gaon

This place is situated three miles south of Paiṭha, and is also called Vatsavana. This is one place where Śrī Kṛṣṇa and the *sakhās* would herd the calves (*bachḍa*). Kanaka Sāgara, Sahasra Kuṇḍa, Rāma Kuṇḍa, Advāro Kuṇḍa, Rāvari Kuṇḍa, and the temples of Mākkhana-chora Ṭhākura and Vatsa-Vihārī Ṭhākura also lie here.

Brahmājī stole the cowherd boys and calves in order to have further *darśana* of Śrī Kṛṣṇa's sweet *līlās*. Śrī Kṛṣṇa personally took the forms of all the cowherd boys, as well as the forms of their sticks, flutes, horns, calves and so forth; and for one year He went cow-grazing and performed other *līlās* that they had all previously done.

One or two days before a full year had elapsed, Śrī Kṛṣṇa, Balarāma and the cowherd boys were grazing the calves here. The adult *gopas* were grazing the cows nearby on Govardhana Hill, and their newborn calves were with them. When the cows saw their older offspring with Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma, they ran towards them bellowing loudly, without caring for the thorns, sharp grass and ditches on the way. The adult *gopas* tried their level best to obstruct them using their sticks, but to no avail. The cows did not even care for their newborn calves. When they met their older calves at this place, they began to lick them lovingly. The older *gopas* became very angry that they could not restrain the cows, and thought that their children had attracted the cows by sounding their flutes and horns. Desiring to punish their children, they went there quickly; but as soon as they arrived, their anger completely vanished and they embraced them instead.

Śrī Baladevajī was very surprised to see this incident. He thought, "Why did the cows leave their younger calves today and show more affection to their older ones? Previously, they had more love for their younger calves, and even more love for *bhaiyā* Kṛṣṇa. Also, the mothers of the cowherd boys used to love Kṛṣṇa more than their own sons, but now they love them both equally." Baladevajī sought the answer to this riddle through the eyes of *samādhī*. Smiling, He said to Kṛṣṇa, "*Bhaiyā*, was one mother's milk not enough to fill Your stomach? Did You have to become the children of hundreds and thousands of mothers so that You could suck their milk too? But even this did not fill Your stomach, so You assumed the form of all these calves and drank the milk of millions of cows. What is the secret of this *līlā* of Yours?" Kṛṣṇa then revealed the entire mystery to Baladevajī. Thus, because this forest is where Kṛṣṇa revealed Himself to be all the calves (the Hindi word for 'calf' is *bachḍa*), it is called Bachavana.

Gaurī Tīrtha

A little further east of Ānyora Grāma is Gaurī Kuṇḍa. This attractive place is full of *kadamba* trees amidst luxuriant, green *kuśjas*. It is where the secret *vihāras* of Candrāvalī and Kṛṣṇa took place. The play *Vidagdha Mādhava* gives a very sweet and beautiful description of this.

Candrāvalī is the daughter of Candrabhānu Gopa, the elder brother of Vṛṣabhānu Mahārāja. In regard to her beauty (*rūpa*), qualities (*guṇa*), charm (*lāvaṇya*), cleverness (*vaidagdhyā*) and so forth, She is the topmost *gopī* of the party that is opposed (*vipakṣa*) to Śrīmatī Rādhikā. Padmā and Śaibyā are her principal *sakhīs*. On the pretext of performing Gaurī *pūjā* with her *sakhīs*, Candrāvalī used to meet Kṛṣṇa at this appointed place. Śrī Kṛṣṇa would perform some pastimes (*krīḍā-vinoda*) with her for a while. Sometimes, Rūpa and Rati Maṣjarīs of Śrīmatī Rādhikā's party would use clever tricks to take Śrī Kṛṣṇa from here to meet with Śrīmatī Rādhikā at Śrī Rādhā Kuṇḍa.

Once, while performing pastimes with Candrāvalī, Kṛṣṇa became confused and inadvertently asked her, “Rādhē! Are You alright?” Hearing Rādhājī's name, Candrāvalī became irritated and replied, “Mahārāja Kaṁsa! Are You alright?”

Puzzled, Kṛṣṇa asked, “*Sakhī!* Where is Kaṁsa here?”

“Where is Your Rādhā here?” was Candrāvalī's reply.

Kṛṣṇa understood His mistake and, feeling very ashamed, begged Candrāvalī's forgiveness.

Ānyora Gaon

This village lies on the *parikramā* path two miles south of the town of Govardhana. Jatīpurā, or Gopālapurā Grāma, lies to the west of the village, on the other side of Govardhana. *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* describes how on the advice of Kṛṣṇa, Nanda Bābā and the other Brajabāsīs began worshipping Girirājāī here instead of performing Indra *pūjā*. It also describes how they performed the Annakūṭa festival for Girirājāī here. They cooked many delicacies in their homes, filled hundreds of carts with milk, yoghurt, *rabaḍī* and many kinds of preparations, and presented them before Girirājāī. Śrī Kṛṣṇa Himself offered everything to Girirājāī and at the same time assumed a huge four-handed form, with which He devoured all the offerings by extending His long arms. Begging for more to eat, He called out in great happiness, *Āno re! Āno re!* (“Bring more! Bring more!”) Kṛṣṇa folded His hands and said, “We are poor Brajabāsīs. Whatever we have, we have presented before You. Please be satisfied with this.” In His four-handed form, Girirājāī drank the water of Mānasī Gaṅgā, Kusuma Sarovara and other *kuṇḍas* and exclaimed, *Tṛpto 'smi! Tṛpto 'smi!* (“I am satisfied! I am satisfied!”), and wiped His hands and mouth with His cloth. He told the Brajabāsīs to ask for a boon. They requested for only one – “May this *lālā* of ours always remain happy and live a very long life.” When the four-handed form disappeared, Kṛṣṇa asked the Brajabāsīs, “Did you ever have *darśana* of Indra Deva?

Girirājajī is very kind. He fulfils everyone's desires." After performing Govardhana Pūjā, the Brajabāsīs considered their lives successful.

This place has been named Ānyora Grāma because of Girirājajī's calling out, *Āno re! Āno re!* At the place where the Brajabāsīs performed Annakūṭa, one can find natural markings of their bowls on the rocks of Girirājajī. Nearby is a *bājanā-śilā*, which emits a sweet sound when tapped with a piece of rock, a stick or a finger.

The place of Śrī Nāthajī's appearance

This place is situated near the *bājanā-śilā*. Once, Śrī Mādhavendra Purījī, the *parama-guru* of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu and the *guru* of Śrī Īśvara Purī, came to Braja. *Braja-prema* is difficult to obtain even for Brahmā and other demigods, but it has been distributed freely in the world by Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu. Mādhavendra Purīpāda is the seed or sprout of that *prema-kalpataru* (desire-tree that bestows *prema*). He was a *sannyāsī* who followed *ayācaka vṛtti*; in other words, he never begged food from anyone. Once, he was performing *bhajana* in a secluded place near Govinda Kuṇḍa, surrounded by lush, green trees and creepers. For two or three days, he was so absorbed in his *bhajana* that he was even unconscious of his own body. On the third day, at midday, a cowherd boy whose complexion was of a *śyāma* colour arrived there, carrying a pot of milk in his hand. The boy said, "Bābā! Nobody remains hungry in Braja. My mother saw you as she passed by, carrying water from the well. She understood that you are hungry and thirsty, so she has sent this milk for you. I am going cowherding now. When I return, I will collect the pot." Saying this, the boy quickly left.

Purījī pondered over the sweet talk, pleasant behaviour and beauty of that boy. He thought, "In my whole life, I have never seen such a beautiful boy." Purījī completed his *bhajana*, offered the milk to his *ārādhya deva* and then drank it. The unequalled taste and fragrance of the milk made Purījī ecstatic. He became overwhelmed in *kṛṣṇa-prema*, but he could apply no concentration to his *bhajana*. With tear-filled eyes, he began waiting for that *śyāma*-complexioned boy to return. Night fell but the boy did not come. During *brahma-muhūrta* he dozed off a little and saw the same boy come near him and say, "I am Gopāla, the son of Brajarāja Nanda. My other name is Śrī Nāthajī. Mahārāja Vajranābha installed Me here on top of Girirājajī. Long ago, My *pujārīs* hid Me under the earth in the nearby valley of Govardhana because they feared the *mlecchas* (barbarians). I have been thirsty and hungry for many days and am now feeling very hot. I have been waiting for you for a long time, thinking, 'When will Mādhavendra take Me from here and serve Me?'" Saying this, the boy indicated His hiding place and disappeared.

In the morning, when Purījī narrated this incident to the villagers, they all dug at the place specified in the dream and found Gopālajī. This made Purī Gosvāmī and the Brajabāsīs jubilant. An altar was built on top of the hill by erecting three vertical stones in three directions and placing a horizontal slab across them. Gopālajī was seated on that throne. A *mahābhiṣeka* was

performed with an abundance of milk, yoghurt and other *paścāmṛta* ingredients. The Brajabāsīs offered an *annakūṭa*, or pile of grains, made up of *dāl*, rice, *kaḍhī*, *pūrī*, *kacauḍī* and many other delicious preparations. The neighbouring people, especially the wealthy merchants of Mathurā, participated in the festival by body, mind and wealth. After serving Gopālajī like this for some time, Mādhavendra Purījī, on the order of Śrī Nāthajī, turned the responsibility of the *sevā* over to his disciples and went to Jagannātha Purī to procure *malayaja candana*, or sandalwood from the Malaya Hills, for Him. This village is currently named Jatipurā after him, as the word *jatī* means *sannyāsi*. This incident has been described very beautifully in *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta*. Nowadays, Śrī Nāthajī presides in Śrī Nāthadvāra.

Due to the atrocities of the fanatic Mughal ruler Aurangzeb, the king of Jaipura brought Śrī Nāthajī to his kingdom in Rājasthāna along with the deities of Śrī Govinda, Śrī Gopīnātha and Śrī Madana-Mohana of Vṛndāvana.

Govinda Kuṇḍa

When Indra saw that the Brajabāsīs had stopped worshipping him and were worshipping Govar-dhana instead, he became angry. Consequently, for seven days he poured torrential rains on them and sent thunderbolts to destroy them. However, he was unsuccessful in his endeavour. Finally, being advised by Brahmājī to ask for forgiveness for his *aparādha*, Indra performed *abhiṣeka* of Śrī Kṛṣṇa with the milk of Surabhī-devī at this place. Śrī Kṛṣṇa was named ‘Govinda’ here because He nourished and gave *ānanda*, or pleasure, to all – the *go* (cows), *gopas*, *gopīs*, and land of Braja. This place is known as Govinda Kuṇḍa because the *nāma-karaṇa* and *abhiṣeka* of Śrī Govinda were performed here. Śrī Vajranābha established this *kuṇḍa* in memory of this *līlā*.

Pūṣcharī

This place marks the southern border of Govardhana. We have previously told that Govardhana’s form resembles a cow, but it can also be likened to a peacock. This furthest extremity is raised high like the peacock’s tail (*pūcha*). One completes one’s *parikramā* of Govardhana’s eastern side here, and from here one begins *parikramā* of his western side. Apsarā Kuṇḍa and Navala Kuṇḍa are situated here.

Apsarā Kuṇḍa and Navala Kuṇḍa

These two *kuṇḍas* lie near each other. Śrīmatī Rādhikā is an extremely beautiful *apsarā*, or transcendental damsel. Apsarā Kuṇḍa received its name after Her, and the eternally youthful Nandanandana is present here as Navala Kuṇḍa (*navala* means ‘young’). Nearby is a *rāsa-sthalī* that is rendered very delightful and charming by a grove of thousands of *kadamba* and *tamāla* trees. Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa Yugala melted in *prema* while dancing in the

rāsa-līlā here. Apsarā Kuṇḍa and Navala Kuṇḍa are Their melted forms. Fortunate *sādhakas* obtain *darśana* of these *kuṇḍas*.

Rāghava Paṇḍita's cave

Adjacent to this *rāsa-sthalī* is a cave where an associate of Mahāprabhu, the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava Rāghava Paṇḍita, used to perform *nirjana bhajana* (*bhajana* in seclusion). Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī arranged for Śrīnivāsa Ācārya and Śrīla Narottama Ṭhākura to perform *parikramā* of Braja Maṇḍala with Rāghava Paṇḍita. He was a highly realised soul and *rasika* Vaiṣṇava, and is mentioned in *Bhakti-ratnākara*. Near this cave, on top of Govardhana Hill, is an imprint of Śrī Kṛṣṇa's crown.

Śyāma Dhāka

This pastime-place of Śrī Kṛṣṇa is situated one mile west of Pūṣcharī and is filled with lush, green *palāśa* trees. Adjacent to it is a very large *kadamba-khaṇḍī*. The leaves of these *kadamba* trees resemble the shape of cups. Śrī Kṛṣṇa used to drink buttermilk from these leaf-cups along with His friends. This is also a *rāsa-sthalī*.

Surabhi Kuṇḍa

This *kuṇḍa*, which is filled with clean, sweet water, lies on the right-hand side of the *parikramā* path, somewhat further along from Rāghava Paṇḍita's cave. On Indra's request, Surabhī performed *abhiṣeka* of Śrī Govindajī at Govinda Kuṇḍa with the milk from her udder. Later, out of greed to have *darśana* of Śrī Kṛṣṇa's cowherding *līlās* and especially of Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa Yugala's secret *nikuṣja-līlās*, Surabhī resided at this place for the duration of Śrī Kṛṣṇa's manifest *braja-līlā*. Mahārāja Vajranābha built this Surabhi Kuṇḍa in her memory. By taking bath and performing *ācamana* here, all one's sins, *aparādhās* and *anarthas* are dispelled and one obtains *braja-prema*.

Airāvata Kuṇḍa

On the order of Indra, his elephant carrier Airāvata used his trunk to perform *abhiṣeka* of Śrī Kṛṣṇa with the water of the heavenly Gaṅgā. Near the *kuṇḍa* on top of the hill are the impressions of Airāvata's feet.

Rudra Kuṇḍa

This *kuṇḍa* is also called Rudana Kuṇḍa. Here Mahādevajī became so absorbed in meditation on Śrī Kṛṣṇa's *līlās* that he began to weep. *Rudana* means 'weeping'. Sūrya Kuṇḍa and Bilachū Kuṇḍa also lie here. Nearby is the place where Kṛṣṇa used to play ball. In this area, one can also see Śrīmatī Rādhikā's *baiṭhaka*, *jāna-ajāna* trees and a *pūjanī-sīlā*.

Jatīpurā

This is where Śrī Mādhavendra Purī-yati resided and performed *bhajana*. When the deity of Śrī Nāthajī manifested Himself, He was placed on top of Govardhana. Here Mādhavendra Purī performed the *abhiṣeka* and *annakūṭa*

festival of Śrī Nāthajī. On the order of Śrī Nāthajī, Mādhavendra Purī then went to Purī Dhāma to procure *malayaja candana* and camphor after entrusting the *sevā* of Śrī Nāthajī to his disciples. When he arrived at Remunā, the deity of Gopīnāthajī stole a pot of *khīra* and sent it to him. By this action, Gopīnāthajī received the name Khīra-corā Gopīnātha. When Mādhavendra Purī was returning from Jagannātha Purī with the *candana* and camphor, he received an order from Śrī Nāthajī of Govardhana through a dream. Śrī Nāthajī told him that by grinding the *candana* and camphor and smearing it on the body of Khīra-corā Gopīnāthajī, the heat of His own body would be dissipated. It is said that by performing this *sevā* for Khīra-corā Gopīnāthajī every day for one month, Śrī Nāthajī's body became cool once more. It is not mentioned whether or not Mādhavendra Purī returned to Govardhana. His *samādhi* lies in Remunā near the temple of Khīra-corā Gopīnātha.

The Six Gosvāmīs, especially Śrī Rūpa, Sanātana and Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmīs, had very good relations with Śrī Viṭṭhalācārya, the son of Śrī Vallabhācārya. He had an affectionate and friendly relationship with Śrī Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī. Śrī Rūpa and Sanātana Gosvāmīs considered Raghunātha dāsa to be their younger brother, and so they also regarded Śrī Viṭṭhalācāryajī as their younger brother and loved him dearly. The topmost *niṣkiṣcanas*, the Śrī Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavācāryas, used to remain absorbed in *bhāva-sevā* (meditation on the *aṣṭa-kālīya līlā*) of Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa Yugala by means of *harināma-saṅkīrtana*. Therefore, they had entrusted the responsibility of the *sevā* of Śrī Nāthajī to the sons of Śrī Vallabhācārya. Our Gosvāmīs considered Śrī Girirāja-Govardhana to be Śrī Kṛṣṇa Himself, and therefore they never used to climb on Govardhana to take *darśana* of Śrī Nāthajī. Whenever the Gosvāmīs had a fervent desire to see Him, Śrī Nāthajī would Himself descend on some pretext or other to bestow His *darśana*, sometimes coming to Gāṇṭholī Grāma and sometimes to Sataghaḍā in Mathurā. This is mentioned in *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta* and *Bhakti-ratnākara*. Śrīman Mahāprabhu did not climb upon Govardhana either, and had *darśana* of Śrī Nāthajī in Gāṇṭholī Grāma.

Annakūṭa-sthalī

The place adjacent to Govardhana in Jatīpurā is called Annakūṭa-sthalī. Mādhavendra Purījī held the grand Annakūṭa festival at this place for one month. Even now, Annakūṭa festivals are held here on special occasions, and each day of the year thousands of pilgrims perform *abhiṣeka* of Girirājajī with thousands of litres of milk.

Bilachū Kuṇḍa

This *kuṇḍa* is also called Vilāsa-vadana, and is a place of Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa's *vilāsa*.

Kadamba-khaṇḍī (Sakhī-sthalī)

Further on from Bilachū Kuṇḍa, after crossing Dāna Ghāṭī, one enters the town of Govardhana and again performs *parikramā* of Mānasī Gaṅgā and Cakreśvara. North-west of Mānasī Gaṅgā is Sakhī-sthalī, the place of Candrāvalī Sakhī. This village is now known as Sakhītharā, and lies within Sakhīvana.

Śrī Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī used to perform *bhajana* on the bank of Rādhā Kuṇḍa. For his daily sustenance, he would only drink a little buttermilk in a tiny *kadamba*-leaf cup. He would remain absorbed in *bhajana* day and night. One day, a Brajabāsī brought some buttermilk in a larger *kadamba*-leaf cup. Śrī Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī asked him from where he had procured it, and the Brajabāsī joyfully responded, “I brought it from Sakhī-sthalī.” At that time, Dāsa Gosvāmī was not in external consciousness, so hearing the name Sakhī-sthalī irritated him, and he angrily ordered the Brajabāsī to leave. The Brajabāsī could not understand Dāsa Gosvāmī’s mood and fled. Śrī Dāsa Gosvāmī is an intimate maidservant in Śrīmatī Rādhikā’s own group (*svapakṣa*). An ordinary person cannot comprehend his deep mood and actions.

Sauṅkarāī

At this place, Rādhikā’s *svapakṣa gopīs* made Kṛṣṇa repeatedly swear that He knew no one other than Śrī Rādhikā. Hence, this place is called Sauṅkarāī, from *śapatha karvāna*, meaning ‘to get an oath to be taken’. Sauṅkarāī is situated two miles west of Govardhana.

Śakravā Gaon

Currently called Śakravā, this village lies one and a half miles north-west of Sakhītharā. This is where Indra donated a Surabhī cow to Kṛṣṇa. Śakra Kuṇḍa and Gvāla Kuṇḍa lie here.

Uddhava Kuṇḍa

This *kuṇḍa* is situated exactly west of Kusuma Sarovara on the right side of the *parikramā* path. The *Skanda Purāṇa*, quoted in *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam Māhātmya*, gives a very interesting description of this place. Vajranābha Mahārāja manifested Uddhava Kuṇḍa under the guidance of Śaṇḍilya and other *ṛṣis*. Uddhavajī always resides here as grass and shrubs in order to be sprinkled by the foot-dust of the *gopīs*. After the disappearance of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, His queens in Dvārakā were greatly afflicted by sorrow. Once, Vajranābhajī came here with them, and they performed a very loud *saṅkīrtana*. In that *mahā-saṅkīrtana*, all the *parikāras* of Kṛṣṇa started to appear one by one. The *parikāras* of Dvārakā all began to sing *kīrtana* and dance in the *saṅkīrtana maṇḍala*, and Arjuna began to dance and play *mṛdaṅga*. Suddenly, the *mahā-bhāgavata* Uddhava emerged from the grass and shrubs, and he also became immersed in dancing. How could Kṛṣṇa now remain behind when this *mahā-saṅkīrtana* was taking place? In that *mahā-saṅkīrtana rāsa*, Kṛṣṇa finally also appeared along with Śrīmatī Rādhikā and

the other *sakhīs* and, after some time, disappeared again. Uddhavajī thus pacified the queens at this place.

Pilgrims performing *parikramā* of Śrī Govardhana proceed along the *parikramā* path till they arrive at Śrī Rādhā Kuṇḍa. The *parikramā* and pastime-places in the vicinity of Śrī Rādhā Kuṇḍa have already been described in the chapter on Rādhā Kuṇḍa and Śyāma Kuṇḍa.

Pastime-places Visited After Parikramā of Govardhana

After completing *parikramā* of Girirāja Govardhana, pilgrims performing *parikramā* of Śrī Braja Maṇḍala proceed from the town of Govardhana or from Jatipurā towards Nīma Gaon.

Nīma Gaon

At this place, Śrī Kṛṣṇa's mother and grandmother, as well as the local *gopīs*, worshipped (*nirmaṣchana*) Kṛṣṇa and kissed His face. Kṛṣṇa is more dear to these *gopīs* than their own sons and their own life. The name 'Nīma Gaon' has degenerated from 'Nirmaṣchana Gaon'. This village is situated on the Govardhana-Varsānā highway, two miles west of Govardhana, and is where Śrī Nimbārkācārya performed *bhajana*. A temple of the Nimbarka Sampradāya lies here, as well as a *kuṇḍa*. This is also a place of *bhajana* for Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas.

Pāṭala Grāma

This village is situated two miles north of Nīma Gaon. Śrīmatī Rādhikā and the *sakhīs* used to pick *pāṭala* flowers, or roses, here; hence, this village became known as Pāṭala Grāma. Its present name is Pāḍara.

Ḍerāvalī

While moving to Nandagaon, Śrī Nanda Mahārāja camped (*ḍerā ḍālā*) here upon arriving from Chaṭṭīkarā. This village is therefore known as Ḍerāvalī.

Navāgrāma

This pastime-place lies south-west of Rādhā Kuṇḍa; its present name is Kuṣjerā. The boundary of the *kuṣjas* of Rādhā Kuṇḍa begins here. Navāgrāma received the name Kuṣjerā because of the presence of its many *kuṣjas*. Here, the *gopīs* arranged themselves in the form of an elephant (*kuṣjara*), and Kṛṣṇa climbed upon them. This place is also known as Kuṣjerā on account of this playful event (*kuṣjara-kṛīḍā*).

Sūrya Kuṇḍa (Choṭā Bharanā)

This *kuṇḍa* is situated about four miles north of Rādhā Kuṇḍa. Śrīmatī Rādhikā used to come here with Her *sakhīs*, especially on Sundays, on the pretext of performing worship of Mitradeva, or Sūryadeva. At that time, Śrī Kṛṣṇa would also come here disguised as a priest, along with Madhumaṅgala, and would perform the worship of Mitra-devatā with great merriment. Mitra has two meanings: it refers to Sūrya-devatā (the Sungod)

but also to *prāna-sakhā*, or Kṛṣṇa Himself. Jaṭilā would understand *mītra* to mean Sūrya-devatā only. She could not comprehend the loving emotions of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa Yugala.

This *līlā* was performed in the third *prahara* of the day, after which Śrīmatījī would return to Jāvaṭa along with Her friends and mother-in-law Jaṭilā. Kṛṣṇa and Madhumaṅgala would also return from here to the company of the *sakhās* in the valley of Govardhana. Kṛṣṇa's friends would run and meet Him, as if He had been gone for only a moment and was just returning from some nearby place.

The *kuṣja* where the *līlā* of *sūrya-pūjā* would take place is situated next to Sūrya Kuṇḍa. Since it is a place of loving enjoyment for Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa Yugala, it is also called Madana-raṇa-vāṭikā. A beautiful temple of Sūryadeva can also be found here. Today, Sūrya Kuṇḍa is also called Choṭā Bharanā.

On the west bank of this *kuṇḍa* is where the Gauḍīya *mahātma* Śrī Madhusūdana Bābājī used to perform *bhajana*. He was a greatly self-realised soul and *rasika* Vaiṣṇava. Vaiṣṇavas used to come to him from distant places to receive *bhajana śikṣa*. The famous Vaiṣṇava Sarvabhauma Jagannātha dāsa Bābājī Mahārāja was a disciple of this *mahāpuruṣa*. Śrī Jagannātha dāsa Bābājī also performed *bhajana* here for a long time, before moving to Śrī Navadvīpa Dhāma. His *bhajana-kuṭī* and *samādhi* are in Śrī Koladvīpa. Śrī Saccidānanda Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura met Śrī Jagannātha dāsa Bābājī at Sūrya Kuṇḍa. In the *bhāgavata-paramparā*, this *siddha bābājī* is the *guru (śikṣa guru)* of Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura.

Kyoṇ Nāi (Konāi)

This was an appointed meeting place of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa Yugala. Once, Śrī Kṛṣṇa was waiting for Śrīmatī Rādhikā here. Some of Śrīmatī Rādhikā's friends hid Her in a nearby *kuṣja* and arrived here early to test Kṛṣṇa's eagerness to meet with Her. Very eagerly, Kṛṣṇa asked the *sakhīs*, "Why has Kīśorījī not come?" (*Kyoṇ nā āi?*)

The *sakhīs* answered in a way that increased Kṛṣṇa's longing, "Abhimanyu is home today. Both Jaṭilā and Kuṭilā are also very vigilantly keeping watch, so She is unable to leave Her house. There is a very little possibility of Her coming to see You today."

Hearing this, a look of sadness fell upon Kṛṣṇa's face and He became very distressed. Seeing Him so seriously afflicted by separation from Śrīmatījī pleased the *sakhīs*, and they brought Śrīmatī Rādhikā out from the nearby *kuṣja*, thus arranging Her meeting with Kṛṣṇa. Since Kṛṣṇa asked the question *Kyoṇ nā āi?* here, this place was named Kyoṇ Nāi, which in time degenerated into Konāi, its present name. This village is situated four miles north of Śrī Rādhā Kuṇḍa. Gvāla Kuṇḍa and Go Kuṇḍa are worth seeing here.

Bhadāvara

The present name of Bhadāvara is Bhadāhara, and it is the residence of Bhadrā, who is one of the eight *yūtheśvarīs*. She is *taṭastha*, or neutral,

towards Śrīmatī Rādhikā, and is Śrīmatī Candrāvalī's *suhṛda-pakṣa*, in the party of her friends.

Gāṇṭholī

At this place, Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa Yugala played Holī while seated on a throne, and thus became intoxicated in *rāsa-vilāsa*. At that time, Śrī Lalitājī quietly tied the corners of Their cloths in a knot (*gāṇṭha*). When They stood up, They could not separate Themselves from each other. Seeing this, the *sakhīs* began to laugh. On account of this mysterious *līlā*, this place is called Gāṇṭholī. It is situated on the Govardhana-Ḍīg highway.

Sometimes, to bestow His *darśana* to His devotees, Śrī Nāthajī used to come to this village on the pretext of escaping the hands of the *mlecchas*. When Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu came to Govardhana, He had an intense desire to have *darśana* of Śrī Nātha Gopālajī. Simultaneously, the *pujārīs*, who feared an attack by the *mlecchas*, brought Śrī Nāthajī to Gāṇṭholī for three days. Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu never used to climb on Govardhana because He considered him to be the *svarūpa* of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. This is why His followers, the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas, do not climb on Govardhana Hill to have *darśana* of Śrī Nāthajī. Śrī Rūpa and Sanātana never set foot on Govardhana. When Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu came to know that Gopālajī was present in Gāṇṭholī Grāma, He stayed here for three days, performed His *parikramā*, chanted prayers, and danced and performed *saṅkīrtana* ecstatically before Gopālajī. One can also take *darśana* of Gulāla Kuṇḍa here.

Gulāla Kuṇḍa

This *kuṇḍa* is situated near Gāṇṭholī on the left side of the highway. During Vasanta (spring), one will observe that the *gulāla* colour (the pink colour of Holī) mixes with the water of this *kuṇḍa*. It is said that after playing Holī, Śrī Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa and the *gopīs* took bath in this *kuṇḍa* and washed off the *gulāla* from their bodies and clothes. This is how it received the name Gulāla Kuṇḍa.

Beheja

This place is situated on the Govardhana-Ḍīg highway about six miles from Govardhana. Indra, although an *aparādhī* of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, shamelessly approached Śrī Kṛṣṇa here to apologise to Him, keeping Surabhī in front of him. The Hindi word for 'shameless' is *behāyā*, and therefore this place became known as Beheja. One can have *darśana* of Sūrya Kuṇḍa, Revatī Kuṇḍa, Bihārījī Mandira and Śrī Rādhā-Kāntajī here. From Beheja, the *parikramā* proceeds on via Devaśīrṣa and Muniśīrṣa. Two miles west of Beheja is Ḍīg.

Devaśīrṣa Sthāna

This is a place of Kṛṣṇa's cowherding pastimes. The topmost *devatās* offered *stava-stutis*, or hymns and prayers, to Śrī Kṛṣṇa here. In Hindi and Sanskrit,

one word for ‘topmost’ is *śīrṣa*. Thus, this place became known as Devaśīrṣa. It lies five miles north of Laṭhāvana.

Muniśīrṣa Sthāna

This place is situated west of Devaśīrṣa. Many prominent *ṛṣis* and *munis* performed austerities here and received the *darśana* of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. *Śīrṣa* also means ‘prominent’. Hence, this place has been called Muniśīrṣa Sthāna. Its name today is Muḍaśerasa. An ancient and famous temple of Candrāvalī-devī stands here.

Sūryapatanavana

This place lies three miles from Beheja, and is currently called Sānvarīkherā. Sūrya-deva worshipped Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa here. In this area, one can have *darśana* of Sūrya Kuṇḍa, Gopāla Kuṇḍa, Gopāla Mandira, Bihārījī Mandira and Gvāla Kuṇḍa.

Dīrghapura (Ḍīg)

Coming from Chaṭṭīkarā, Nanda Bābā camped at Ḍerāvalī; from there, he came to this place and camped here. In other words, he stayed here for some time before proceeding to Kāmyavana. From Kāmyavana, Nanda Bābā went to Nanda-gaon. At this place, Śrī Kṛṣṇa shook or loosened (*digā*) the patience, religiosity and bashfulness of Śrīmatī Rādhikā by the charm of His beauty and the sweetness of His *veṇu*. Hence, this place has been named Ḍīg.

This place was also famous during Tretā-yuga. Just as Śatrughnajī and Bharatajī inhabited Mathurā and Bharata-pura respectively, so Lakṣmaṇajī resided in Dīrghapura. There is a famous temple of Lakṣmaṇajī here. Kṛṣṇa Kuṇḍa, Sākṣī Gopālajī Mandira and Rūpasāgara are some the places to be seen here. The Braja-yātrā camps here while perform-ing *parikramā*.

Paramādanā

This place is currently called Paramadīrā. Its true name is in fact Pramodavana. Here Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa Yugala became very delighted upon meeting each other. The name Pramoda-vana comes from the word *pramoda*, which means ‘delight’ or ‘happiness’. In the north of the village is Kṛṣṇa Kuṇḍa, and in the east is Caraṇa Kuṇḍa.

Setu Kandarā

The present name of Setu Kandarā is simply Seū. Situated in between two hills, this is a delightful place where Śrī Kṛṣṇa herded the cows. Because it lies between two hills, this place is also known as Seū Kandarā. Badrīnārāyaṇa is one and half miles north of here.

Ādi Badrī

Once, Nanda and the other *gopas* and *gopīs* desired to go to Badrīnārāyaṇa in the Himālayas. Understanding this to be their heartfelt desire, Śrī Kṛṣṇa

brought them here for *darśana* of Ādi Badrī. Ādi Badrī is the source of even Badrī Viśāla, located in the Himālayas. One may have *darśana* of Badrīnārāyaṇa, Nara-Nārāyaṇa Ṛṣi, Kuvera, Nārada Ṛṣi, Uddhavajī and others here. Indra sent *apsarās* to break the *tapasya* of Nara-Nārāyaṇa Ṛṣi, but Nara-Nārāyaṇa Ṛṣi manifested Urvaśī from their left thigh and shattered the pride of Indra. Just as Alakānandā and Tapta Kuṇḍa are situated in Badrī in the Himālayas, they are also present here. The water of Tapta Kuṇḍa in Badrī is hot, but the water of Tapta Kuṇḍa here is presently cool.

A little further on from Ādi Badrī, on top of the hill, is the divine *darśana* of Būḍhe Badrī, Gandhamādana Hill, Tapovana, and so on. This very attractive place is surrounded by lush, green mountain-ranges. This is the place of worship of many *ṛṣis* and *munis* and also of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas. The natural scenery of this place resembles that of Badrīnārāyaṇa. Below the hills of Ādi Badrī is the village of Ālīpura, inhabited by people of the *meva* caste.

Ālīpura

The hills of Ādi Badrī ascend from this place. Previously, this village was also named Ādi Badrī, but the Muslims changed it to Ālīpura, just as they converted the names of Ayodhyā to Faizābād, Vṛndāvana to Fakīrābād, Mathurā to Mamīnābād and Prayāga to Allāhābād.

Śāṅharā Śikhara

This place is also called Dhavala Parvata. *Dhavala* means ‘white’. It is also known as Navanīta Parvata, because it has the whitish colour of *navanīta*, or ‘fresh butter’. A *kadamba-khaṇḍī* lies nearby. Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa Yugala performed Their swing *līlā* and many other pastimes here. Adjacent to the *kadamba-khaṇḍī* are Nīla Parvata and Ānandādri (a *ghāṭī*, or passage between two mountains). These places are all situated next to Khoha.

Information regarding the location of the various places on the hill and the distance between them is marked upon a stone. This is testimony to the untiring efforts of the Gauḍīya Gosvāmīs to manifest the glories of these places.

Indraulī

This is Indulekhā Sakhī’s village, and *devarāja* Indra worshipped Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa here to free himself from his *aparādha*. For these reasons this village is named Indraulī or Indrolī. One can have *darśana* of Indra Kuṇḍa, Indra Kūpa and Indulekhā’s *kuṣja* here.

Godṛṣṭivana

Presently called Guhānā, this place lies one mile from Paramodarā. It is a place of Śrī Kṛṣṇa’s cowherding pastimes. Kṛṣṇa used to stand on top of a high hillock to check the whereabouts of His cows. From there, He used to call them with His *varṁśī* – Śyāmalī, Dhavalī, Kāṇḍī, and so on – and they would come running to Him. Śrī Kṛṣṇa counted the cows on His *maṇi-mālā*,

and only when he was satisfied by a full count did He return with them to the cowshed. Gopāla Kuṇḍa and Śyāma Kuṇḍa lie here. This is also the birthplace of Śrī Kṛṣṇa's *sakhā* Sudāma.

Kanovāro

This is another of Śrī Kṛṣṇa's cowherding places. It is also Kaṇva Muni's famous place of worship, which is why it has been named Kanovāro. Nearby, one can have *darśana* of Sunaharā Kadamba-khaṇḍī, Pānihārī Kuṇḍa, Kṛṣṇa Kuṇḍa and other places.

After taking *darśana* of Badrīnārāyaṇa, some pilgrims go straight to Kāmyavana via Seū Ghāṭī and Indraulī. Kāmya-vana lies two miles north-west of Indraulī. Some pilgrims make their way from Badrīnārāyaṇa to Kāmyavana via Guhānā, Khoḥa Gaon, Dhavala Parvata and so forth. Other pilgrims go to Kāmyavana five miles north via Ādi Badrī, Ālīpura and Paśāpa Gaon. Some proceed to Kāmyavana after having *darśana* of Ādi Kedāranātha, which lies five miles west of Paśāpa Gaon. Kāmyavana is situated six miles north-east from Kedarnātha. Bilonda Gaon lies two miles north-east of Kedāranātha, Caraṇa Pahāḍī lies two miles north-east from Bilonda Gaon, and Kāmyavana lies two miles north-east of Caraṇa Pahāḍī.

Chapter 8

Śrī Kāmyavana

(Kāmavana)

*caturtha kāmyakavanam / vanānām vanam-uttamam
tatra gatvā naro devi! / mama loke mahīyate*

(Ādi Varāha Purāṇa)

Kāmyavana, the fourth forest, is one of the topmost amongst the twelve forests of Braja Maṇḍala. That fortunate person who performs *parikramā* of this forest is revered within Braja Dhāma."

*tataḥ kāmyavanam rājan! / yatra bālye sthito bhavān
snāna-mātreṇa sarveṣām / sarva-kāma phala-pradam*

(Skanda Purāṇa)

"He Mahārāja! Thereafter lies Kāmyavana, where Brajendra-nandana Śrī Kṛṣṇa performed many childhood pastimes. Bathing in Kāma and other *sarovaras* of this forest fulfils all kinds of desires, even the desire for Kṛṣṇa's *premamayī sevā* – *sevā* to Kṛṣṇa that is imbued with *prema*."

The word *kāma* can only really be used to denote the *gopīs'* *prema* for Śrī Kṛṣṇa. *Premaiva gopa-rāmānām kāma ity āgamata prathām*.¹ In other words, the pure *prema* of the *gopikās* exists solely to give Kṛṣṇa happiness, and does not carry even the slightest scent of worldly lust (*laukika kāma*). Only this *prema* is referred to as *kāma* in *sāstra*. The *śuddha prema* of the *gopīs* is wholly opposite to the lusty desires in this world. The only aim of the *gopīs'* *kāma*, which is devoid of all varieties of such lust, is to give happiness

to Kṛṣṇa, the abode of *prema*. Therefore, *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* and other *śāstras* refer to the pure and unadulterated *prema* of the *gopīs* as *kāma*. Kāmavana is the pastime-place where Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa Yugala express such transcendental *prema*. In the forest called Kāmavana, one can easily attain even the *gopīs'* *viśuddha prema* in the form of *śuddha kāma*, what to speak of being able to fulfil all kinds of worldly desires.

The word *kāmya* means 'extremely beautiful', 'very well adorned' or 'highly attractive'. This very attractive forest within Braja Maṇḍala is where Śrī Kṛṣṇa plays. Many pleasant *sarovaras*, *kūpas*, *kuṇḍas*, trees, creepers, flowers, fruits and species of birds contribute to its extra-ordinary beauty. Hence, it is called Kāmyavana.

Pastime-places in Kāmyavana

According to the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, there are eighty-four sacred *kuṇḍas*, eighty-four *mandiras*, and eighty-four pillars in Kāmyavana. It is said that a famous king named Śrī Kāmasena established them all. It is also accepted that the *devatās* and *asuras* jointly constructed 168 pillars here.

Kāmyavana has countless small and large *kuṇḍas* and *tīrthas*, as well as a *parikramā* of fourteen miles. Vimala Kuṇḍa is the famous *tīrtha* or *kuṇḍa* of this forest. After taking bath there, one proceeds to take *darśana* of the other holy places in Kāmyavana. Those places include Gopikā Kuṇḍa, Suvarṇapura, Gayā Kuṇḍa and Dharma Kuṇḍa. The *simhāsana* (throne) of Dharmarājajī is worth seeing at Dharma Kuṇḍa. Next come Yajña Kuṇḍa, the Paśca Tīrtha Sarovara of the Pāṇḍavas, Parama Mokṣa Kuṇḍa and Maṇikarṇikā Kuṇḍa. Just nearby are Nivāsa Kuṇḍa and Yaśodā Kuṇḍa. Somewhat further on are Manokāmanā Kuṇḍa, Gopikāramaṇa Kuṇḍa, Setubandha Rāmeśvara Kuṇḍa, Dhyāna Kuṇḍa, Tapta Kuṇḍa, Jal-vihāra Kuṇḍa, Jal-kṛīḍā Kuṇḍa, Raṅgīlā Kuṇḍa, Chabīlā Kuṇḍa, Jakīlā Kuṇḍa, Matīlā Kuṇḍa, Datīlā Kuṇḍa, Paśca Kuṇḍa, Ghoṣarānī Kuṇḍa, Vihvala Kuṇḍa, Śyāma Kuṇḍa, Gomatī Kuṇḍa, Dvārakā Kuṇḍa, Māna Kuṇḍa, Lalitā Kuṇḍa, Viśākhā Kuṇḍa, Dohanī Kuṇḍa, Mohinī Kuṇḍa, Balabhadra Kuṇḍa, Caturbhuja Kuṇḍa, Surabhī Kuṇḍa, Vatsa Kuṇḍa, Luk-lukī Kuṇḍa, Govinda Kuṇḍa, Netramīcana Kuṇḍa, Phisalanī Śīlā, Vyomāsura's cave, Bhojana Thālī, the marriage-place of Sumanā Sakhī, and Lalitā Granthi-datta-sthāna.

Thereafter come Viṣṇu Cinha-pāda Parvata, Garuḍa Tīrtha, Kapila Tīrtha, the place of Lohajaṅgha Ṛṣi, and Hoḍa-sthāna (*hoḍa* means 'wager' or 'bet'). North of these *tīrthas* is the place of Indulekhā-devī, and nearby on top of the hill is the place of Balarāma and the mark of Balarāma's plough. Further north is Kṛṣṇa Kūpa, and nearby is Saṅkarṣaṇa Kuṇḍa. Beyond are the hidden Lokeśvara Tīrtha, Varāha Kuṇḍa, Satī Kuṇḍa and Candrasakhī Puṣkariṇī; and next to these places are the *mūrti* of Candrasekhara Śiva and Śṛṅgāra Tīrtha. South of the hill situated in that place is a *bāvaḍī*, or deep tank with steps, named Prabhālallī. West of this tank is Bhāradvāja Ṛṣi Kūpa. To its north is another Sankarṣaṇa Kuṇḍa and to its east is Kṛṣṇa Kūpa. These three *kūpas* all lie near the hill mentioned earlier. At the top of the hill is the

mūrti of Bhadreśvara Śiva. After this, one comes to the *mūrti* of Alakṣa Garuḍa and the *āśrama* of Pippalāda Ṛṣi.

After having *darśana* of these places, one proceeds to Dihuhālī and Rādhā Puṣkariṇī. In the eastern, northern, western and southern parts of this *puṣkariṇī* (large lake or pond) lie Lalitā Puṣkariṇī, Viśākhā Puṣkariṇī, Candrāvalī Puṣkariṇī, and Candrabhāga Puṣkariṇī respectively. In the south-eastern part is Līlāvatī Puṣkariṇī and in the north-western part is Prabhāvatī Puṣkariṇī. Rādhā Puṣkariṇī is situated in the middle of this large lake. The *puṣkariṇīs* of sixty-four *sakhīs* lie here. Further on is Kuśa-sthalī. One can have *darśana* here of Kameśvara Mahādeva and the place where Śaṅkhacūḍa was killed. To the north are Candra-śekhara Mūrti, Vimaleśvara, and a deity of Varāha. Here, one can also visit the five Pāṇḍavas with Draupadī, Vṛndā-devī with Govindajī, Śrī Rādhā-Vallabha, Navanīta Rāya, Gokuleśvara, and Śrī Rāmacandra. Other places worth visiting include Caraṇa Pahādī, Śrī Rādhā-Gopīnātha, Śrī Rādhā-Mohana (Gopālajī) and Caurāsī Khambā. The most well-known of these pastime-places are described below.

Vimala Kuṇḍa

This famous *kuṇḍa* is situated about four-hundred metres south-west of Kāmavana Gaon. The following deities preside around Vimala Kuṇḍa in this order: (1) Dāūjī, (2) Sūryadeva, (3) Śrī Nīlakaṇṭheśvara Mahādeva, (4) Śrī Govardhana-nātha, (5) Śrī Madan-Mohana and Kāmyavana Vihārī, (6) Śrī Vimala Vihārī, (7) Vimala-devī, (8) Śrī Muralī-Manohara, (9) Bhagavatī Gaṅgā, and (10) Śrī Gopālajī.

According to the *Garga Saṁhitā*, in ancient times a glorious king named Vimala lived in Campaka Nagarī in the country of Sindhu. At first, none of his six thousand queens bore him any children, but, by the mercy of Śrī Yājñavalkya Ṛṣi, many beautiful girls took birth from the wombs of those queens. In their previous births, these girls had been the women of Janakapura who had desired to obtain Śrī Rāmacandrajī as their husband. The girls who took birth in King Vimala's home eventually reached a marriageable age. On the advice of Maharṣi Yājñavalkya, the king sent his emissary to Mathurā Purī to search for Śrī Kṛṣṇa, whom he deemed to be a suitable husband for his daughters. While on his way, the emissary was fortunate to meet Grandfather Bhīṣma, who sent him to Śrī Vṛndāvana, since Śrī Kṛṣṇa was there at that time. Upon arriving in Vṛndāvana, the royal emissary gave Śrī Kṛṣṇa King Vimala's letter of invitation, which requested Śrī Kṛṣṇa to come to Campaka Nagarī to marry the princesses. After receiving Mahārāja Vimala's invitation, Śrī Kṛṣṇa went to Campaka Nagarī and brought the princesses back with Him to this pleasing Kāmavana, situated within Braja Maṇḍala. He assumed as many forms as there were princesses and accepted them all. He performed *rāsa* and other playful pastimes (*krīḍā*) with these *kumārīs*, thus fulfilling their long-cherished desire. The tears of happiness that flowed from their eyes filled a *kuṇḍa*,

which became known as Vimala Kuṇḍa. By bathing in this *kuṇḍa*, all kinds of desires – both worldly and transcendental – are fulfilled and one’s heart becomes pure and instilled with *braja-bhakti*.

It is generally said that all the *tīrthas* of the universe come to Braja during Cātur-māsya, but that once, Tīrtharāja Puṣkara failed to come. Śrī Kṛṣṇa remembered Yogamāyā. Merely by His recollection, a very strong current of water shot out of the earth. Astonishingly, a supremely beautiful and completely pure *kiśorī* appeared from that sacred current. Śrī Kṛṣṇa performed many kinds of games with that beautiful *kiśorī* in the waters of that current. The *kiśorī* completely satisfied *parama rasika* Śrī Kṛṣṇa with her beauty and pure, *prema*-filled *sevā*, and He gave Her a boon: “From today you will be known as Vimala-devī, and this *kuṇḍa* will be named after you. By taking bath in this *kuṇḍa*, one will receive seven times the pious merit of taking bath in Tīrtharāja Puṣkara.” Since then, this *kuṇḍa* has become known as Vimala Kuṇḍa.

Many great *ṛṣis* and *maharṣis* have resided on the bank of this *kuṇḍa* to obtain *kṛṣṇa-bhakti*. It is well known that Maharṣi Durvāsā and the Pāṇḍavas resided here. Every Braja Maṇḍala *parikramā* party or pilgrim performing *parikramā* stays at Vimala Kuṇḍa and begins *parikramā* of Kāmyavana from here only.

Śrī Vṛndā-devī and Śrī Govindadeva

This is Kāmyavana’s most famous temple. *Darśana* of Vṛndā-devī is rare in Braja Maṇḍala, but one can have her special *darśana* here. Śrī Śrī Rādhā-Govindadeva are also present here. Nearby is Śrī Viṣṇu Simhāsana, or the *simhāsana* (throne) of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Close by is Caraṇa Kuṇḍa, where the lotus feet of Śrī Rādhā-Govinda Yugala were bathed.

After Śrī Rūpa, Śrī Sanātana, and the other Gosvāmīs disappeared from this world, the narrow-minded Mughal emperor Aurangzeb destroyed the famous temples of Vṛndāvana, Mathurā and other locations in Braja. At that time, the Mahārāja of Jaipura, who was a great devotee, brought the famous deities of Braja to Jaipura. These included Śrī Govinda, Śrī Gopīnātha, Śrī Rādhā-Dāmodara and Śrī Rādhā-Mādhava. On his way, he rested for some days in Kāmyavana. The deities were taken from the chariots and kept at various locations where regular services to Them were performed, such as bathing, offering *bhoga* and putting to rest. They were later carried to Jaipura and other places. Eventually, large temples were constructed at the places where the deities of Śrī Rādhā-Govinda, Śrī Rādhā-Gopīnātha and Śrī Rādhā-Madana-Mohana had stayed in Kāmyavana, and *pratibhū-vigrahas* of the original deities were installed there.

Śrī Vṛndā-devī came as far as Kāmyavana, but she did not leave Braja to go further. There is thus a special *darśana* of Śrī Vṛndā-devī here.

Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu and His *parikāras*, like Śrī Rūpa and Śrī Sanātana Gosvāmīs, manifested the lost pastime-places of Braja Maṇḍala. Before their arrival in Braja, Kāmyavana was considered to be Vṛndāvana. However, Śrī

Caitanya Mahāprabhu established the place situated near Mathurā as Śrīdhāma Vṛndāvana. It is impossible for Yamunājī, Cīra Ghāṭa, Nidhuvana, Kālīya Dāha, Keśī Ghāṭa, Sevā Kuṣja, Rāsa-sthalī Varṁśīvaṭa, and Śrī Gopīśvara Mahādeva to be situated in Kāmyavana. Therefore, that place where the pastime-places like Vimala Kuṇḍa, Kāmeśvara Mahādeva, Caraṇa Pahādī, Setubandha Rāmeśvara and others are present is Kāmyavana, and it is without doubt separate from Vṛndāvana. Vṛndā-devī resides in Vṛndāvana only. She is the *adhiṣṭhātṛī-devī* of the *kuṣjas* of Vṛndāvana and of the pastimes of Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa Yugala in those *kuṣjas*. Therefore, she now resides in Śrī Rūpa-Sanātana Gauḍīya Maṭha in Śrīdhāma Vṛndāvana, where she grants her divine *darśana*.

In the vicinity of the Śrī Govindadeva Mandira, one can have *darśana* of places like Garuḍajī, Candrabhāṣā Kuṇḍa, Candreśvara Mahādevajī, Varāha Kuṇḍa, Varāha Kūpa, Yajña Kuṇḍa and Dharma Kuṇḍa.

Dharma Kuṇḍa

This *kuṇḍa* lies in the eastern part of Kāmyavana. Śrī Nārāyaṇa is present here in the form of *dharma*. Nearby is a *vedī* (platform) named Viśākhā. There is a special rule that one should take bath here on Kṛṣṇāṣṭamī (the eighth day of the dark moon) on a Wednesday in the month of Bhādra (Bhādrapada) during the Śravaṇā *nakṣatra* (constellation). Within the area of Dharma Kuṇḍa, there are many places one may visit for *darśana*, such as Nara-Nārāyaṇa Kuṇḍa, Nīla Varāha, Paśca Pāṇḍava, Hanumānjī, Paśca Pāṇḍava Kuṇḍa (Paśca Tīrtha), Maṇikarṇikā and Viśveśvara Mahādeva.

The five Pāṇḍavas resided in this attractive Kāmyavana for a long time during their exile to the forest. Once, Mahārānī Draupadī and the Pāṇḍavas felt very thirsty. It was summer and the nearby *sarovaras* and other sources of water had dried up. Water was not available anywhere, not even from distant places. Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira gave one empty pot to his valiant brother Bhīmasena and told him to fill it with clean water. The intelligent Bhīma saw that birds were flying to and from a particular place, so he headed in that direction. After some time, he came to a beautiful *sarovara* full of clean, fragrant water. Being very thirsty, he thought to quench his own thirst first before carrying water back to his brothers. However, as soon as he stepped in the lake, a Yakṣa appeared before him and said, “Answer my questions before daring to drink water, otherwise you will die.” Ignoring the order of the Yakṣa, the great and valiant Bhīmasena filled his palms with some water, but upon doing so he immediately fainted to the ground.

Noting Bhīmasena’s delay in returning, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira sent his brothers one by one to go and fetch water – first Arjuna, then Nakula, and then Sahadeva. Upon reaching the *sarovara*, however, they all met the same fate as Bhīma, having attempted to drink water without following the Yakṣa’s command. Finally, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira went himself and found his brothers all lying on the ground unconscious. He became very worried. He decided to quench his thirst before trying to revive them, but as soon as he went to do

so, the Yakṣa appeared and told Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira that he had to correctly answer his questions before he could drink any water. Very patiently, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira requested the Yakṣa to ask his questions.

Yakṣa: Who rises the sun?

Yudhiṣṭhira: *Brahma* rises the sun.

Yakṣa: What is heavier than the earth itself? What is higher than even the sky? What travels faster than the wind? And what is greater in number than blades of grass or pieces of straw?

Yudhiṣṭhira: One's mother is heavier than the earth. One's father is higher than the sky. The mind is swifter than air, and the thoughts that spring from the mind are more numerous than blades of grass.

Yakṣa: Which is the best *dharma* in the world? What is the best kind of forbearance?

Yudhiṣṭhira: The best *dharma* in the world is mercy. To tolerate the dualities of this world – like pleasure and sorrow, profit and loss, and birth and death – is the best kind of forbearance.

Yakṣa: Who is the invincible enemy of human beings? What is their endless disease? Who is a *sādhū*, and who is not a *sādhū*?

Yudhiṣṭhira: Anger is the invincible enemy of human beings. Greed is their endless disease. One who does good to all living entities is a *sādhū*, and a cruel person who has no control over his senses is not a *sādhū*.

Yakṣa: Who is happy? What is the greatest wonder? What is life's real path? What is newsworthy?

Yudhiṣṭhira: He who has no debt, he who is not in a foreign land, and he who is able somehow or other to eat leaves and herbs after cooking is happy. Every day, living beings make their way to the abode of Yamārāja, the god of death, but those who are left behind think they will live forever. There is no greater wonder than this. Argument has no place in determining the correct path. The *śrutis* are diverse, and the opinions of the *ṛṣis* divided. The *tattva* of *dharma* is thus very deep. Therefore, the path that is followed by *mahāpuruṣas* is the real path. Time is roasting all living beings in the frying pan of illusion and allurements, which represents this material world. It shuffles them with the ladle of months and seasons and cooks them in the fire of the sun planet, which burns up the fuel of day and night. This is the only news in this world.

Yakṣa: O Rājan! You have answered all my questions correctly. You may therefore select any one of your brothers and he will return to life.

Yudhiṣṭhira: Among all my brothers, let dark-complexioned and very powerful Nakula live again.

Yakṣa: Rājan! Why do you want Nakula to be brought back to life? Why not Bhīma, who has the strength of ten thousand elephants, or the invincible archer Arjuna?

Yudhiṣṭhira: I cannot give up *dharma*. I am of the opinion that the supreme *dharma* is to have equal feelings for everyone. My father had two wives, Kuntī and Mādrī. In my opinion, both of them should have sons. Kuntī and Mādrī mean the same to me. I want to preserve this equality; therefore, Nakula should return to life.

Yakṣa: O topmost *bhakta*! You have more respect for *dharma* than for time and wealth! Therefore, all your brothers should live again.

That Yakṣa was none other than Dharmarāja (Śrī Nārāyaṇa) Himself, who had desired to test the *dharma* of his son Yudhiṣṭhira. Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira passed the examination.

Once, when the Pāṇḍavas and Draupadī were living here during their exile, Mahārānī Draupadī went alone one day to take bath in Vimala Kuṇḍa. Meanwhile, the Pāṇḍavas were at their residence, free of anxieties and deeply absorbed in *bhagavad-kathā*. Jayadratha, the brother-in-law of both Duryodhana and the Pāṇḍavas, was attracted to Draupadī. He was waiting for an opportunity to find Draupadī alone so he could kidnap her easily. In this way, he would dis-honour the Pāṇḍavas. On this day, fate had it that he found Draupadī alone taking bath in Vimala Kuṇḍa away from her residence. Jayadratha tried to take Draupadī with him to his kingdom by threat and guile, but Draupadī, the crest-jewel of chaste ladies, firmly refused. Jayadratha then became very angry. He forcefully pulled her up on his chariot and drove the horses very fast.

Draupadī started loudly calling out to Arjuna, Bhīma and Kṛṣṇa for protection. Somehow, her loud cries reached the ears of Arjuna and Bhīma, and the two great warriors immediately ran after the chariot with great speed. *Mahārathi* Arjuna stopped Jayadratha's chariot by shooting arrows of fire at it. Jayadratha jumped from the chariot and fled for his life, but Bhīma outran him and caught him. Both brothers submitted Jayadratha before Draupadī and then before Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira. Bhīma was furious, "This tyrant should be killed immediately!" Arjuna supported Bhīma. However, Dharmarāja Yudhiṣṭhira pacified them both. "This degraded person has committed an offence at the feet of Draupadī," he said. "Therefore, she should choose a suitable punishment for him."

Draupadī, who was very grave, then spoke. "Needless to say, he has committed a horrible offence, yet he is your sister's husband. I cannot bear to see my sister-in-law cry for the rest of her life as a widow. It is therefore best to release him." Bhīma, however, was intent on having him killed. They finally concluded that for a respectable person dishonour is equal to death, and therefore Jayadratha should have his head shaven clean, but in such a way as to give him five *śikhās*. Similarly, before releasing him, they would shave his face leaving only a beard. Arjuna shaved Jayadratha's head and face as planned, thereby dishonouring him. He then released him. Jayadratha went away greatly insulted and performed severe austerities with the aim of killing the Pāṇḍavas. However, Arjuna killed him in the Mahābhārata war, by following the instructions of Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

The wicked Duryodhana was always anxious to destroy the Pāṇḍavas completely. Once, while the Pāṇḍavas and Draupadī were living here during their exile, he invited Maharṣi Durvāsā and fed him a sumptuous, delicious meal with great honour. Durvāsājī was satisfied and requested Duryodhana to ask for a boon. With folded hands, Duryodhana said, “Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira is my elder brother. Please accept his hospitality at his residence together with your sixty-thousand disciples. But you should go and be their guest after midday, during the third *prahara*. The Pāṇḍavas are currently living in Kāmyavana.”

Duryodhana knew very well that the Pāṇḍavas served their guests very carefully. Draupadī had a pot that had been given to her by Sūryadeva. The cooking done in that one pot could feed innumerable persons to their satisfaction, but once Draupadī ate and cleaned the pot, that pot could no longer provide any further food. Draupadī would feed any guests as well as the Pāṇḍavas, and then clean the pot without fail before the third *prahara*. Durvāsājī and his sixty thousand disciples were to arrive there during the third *prahara* so that the Pāṇḍavas would not be able to feed them. Duryodhana expected that the very hot-tempered Durvāsā Ṛṣi would curse the Pāṇḍavas and thus burn them to ashes.

Maharṣi Durvāsā is fully aware of the glories of the Pāṇḍavas, who are *kṛṣṇa-bhaktas*. However, it is difficult for even the demigods to understand his contrary activities. Only he knows what, when and why he does what he does. Thus, he and sixty thousand *ṛṣis* reached the residence of the Pāṇḍavas in Kāmyavana in the afternoon. Upon seeing him, the Pāṇḍavas became very happy. Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira worshipped him and requested him to accept his hospitality. Maharṣi said, “We are now going to take bath in Vimala Kuṇḍa and will come back very soon. You should arrange for our meals. We will eat here.” Saying this, Durvāsājī left to take bath together with his whole entourage.

The Pāṇḍavas now became very concerned. What arrangement could be made to feed these *ṛṣis*? They called Draupadī and asked her if she could arrange to feed a gathering of sixty thousand, but her pot had already been cleaned and turned upside down. She considered hard what to do to save the Pāṇḍavas but could think of no plan. At last, she began calling out to her dear friend Śrī Kṛṣṇa in a very distressed voice. How could Dvārakānātha not come upon hearing her call? He immediately appeared in front of Draupadī and said, “*Sakhī*, I am very hungry! Give Me something to eat.” Draupadī answered, “You are hungry and I have nothing at home. My pot has been cleaned and is lying upside down. The very hot-tempered Maharṣi Durvāsā together with his sixty thousand disciples are about to come to take their meal. When he finds that there is nothing to eat, he will annihilate the Pāṇḍavas. This will be unavoidable, therefore, first please arrange for them to be fed.”

Śrī Kṛṣṇa said, “I cannot do anything without eating and drinking, so please bring your pot.”

In a very sad voice Draupadī said, “There is nothing in the pot. I have cleaned it very thoroughly.”

“Still, you please bring it. I want to see.”

Draupadī brought the pot and put it in Kṛṣṇa’s hands. Kṛṣṇa looked into it and became joyful. A very tiny piece of leafy vegetable was stuck to the side of the pot. Śrī Kṛṣṇa scraped it off with His nail and put in His mouth. He then filled His stomach with water poured by Draupadī’s hands. *Tṛpto ‘smi! Tṛpto ‘smi!* (“I am satisfied! I am satisfied!”) he exclaimed, and he began to pat His stomach with His hand. He even belched in satisfaction. Śrī Kṛṣṇa then sent Bhīma-sena to quickly go and call the *ṛṣis*. The great warrior Bhīma, club in hand, started towards Vimala Kuṇḍa.

Maharṣi Durvāsā and his disciples had been bathing in Vimala Kuṇḍa when suddenly their stomachs felt so full that they all started belching as if they had eaten a meal. When Durvāsājī saw Bhīma coming towards them, the memory of the incident with Ambarīṣa Mahārāja entered his mind and he became very frightened. He and his sixty thousand disciples quickly fled to Maharṣi Loka through the celestial pathways. Upon arriving at Vimala Kuṇḍa, Bhīma could not find the *ṛṣis* anywhere. He returned and told Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira and Śrī Kṛṣṇa, “I searched everywhere but could not find them.”

After learning what had happened from Śrī Kṛṣṇa, Draupadī and the Pāṇḍavas became free from anxiety. If Śrī Kṛṣṇa is satisfied, then the whole universe is satisfied. This is indeed this episode’s message to the world. This *līlā* of Śrī Kṛṣṇa took place here at Kāmyavana.

Another time, while the Pāṇḍavas were residing here, the wicked Duryodhana discovered their whereabouts and descended upon Kāmyavana with all his brothers, associates like Karṇa and Śakuni, relatives, friends, and an army of four divisions. For some days, he set up a very festive camp on the bank of Vimala Kuṇḍa just to humiliate the Pāṇḍavas.

When Indra came to know of this, he ordered his general Citrasena to arrest Duryodhana. Citrasena defeated Duryo-dhana’s entire army, arrested him and took him to Indra by the aerial pathways, Duryodhana loudly shouting and screaming all the while. Yudhiṣṭhira Mahārāja heard his crying and ordered Bhīmasena to rescue him, but Bhīmasena objected, “Mahārāja! Duryodhana wanted to harm us, which is why our best well-wisher Citrasena has caught him and is taking him away. It is best if we remain quiet.” Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira could not tolerate this. He looked at Arjuna and said,

“Brother Arjuna! Our brother Suyodhana² is in danger, and it is our duty to rescue him. We can quarrel and fight among ourselves over some issue, but in regard to others we one hundred and five brothers are one. Quickly rescue Suyodhana.” The *mahārathī* Arjuna easily released Duryo-dhana from the hands of Citrasena, the general of the demigods, and brought him down to stand before Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira, who met him very affectionately and respectfully sent him back to his place of residence. But the blackness of coal does not go away even if the coal is washed millions of times with soap. The affectionate behaviour of Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira pierced Duryodhana’s

heart like a sharp iron rod. He considered himself dishonoured, and returned to Hastinapura very agitated. Whoever God protects, no one can harm. Indeed, no one can so much as twist a single hair of someone who is under Śrī Kṛṣṇa's shelter.

Nearby, at Paśca Tīrtha Sarovara, were some wonderful *mūrtis* of the Pāṇḍavas and Draupadī. This place is uninhabited, and therefore a thief was able to steal a few of the *mūrtis* here some time ago, while others have been broken. Since then, the remaining *mūrtis* have been kept in the nearby Kāmeśvara Mandira, where they are neglected.

Dharma Kūpa and many other places that seem to be connected with the Pāṇḍavas lie close by.

Yaśodā Kuṇḍa

This place in Kāmyavana was the residence of Śrī Yaśodājī's father. During His childhood, Śrī Kṛṣṇa would sometimes come to stay at this very attractive place with His mother. Sometimes, Nanda Bābā and his family and associates used to camp here with their cows. Śrī Kṛṣṇa and the *sakhās* also used to graze the cows here.

Bhakti-ratnākara mentions this *tīrtha*:

*dekha yaśodā kuṇḍa parama nirmala
ethā gocāraṇe kṛṣṇa haīyā vihvala*

"See this supremely pure Yaśodā Kuṇḍa, where Kṛṣṇa joyfully herded His cows."

Gayā Kuṇḍa

At this place in Braja Maṇḍala, the *tīrtha* of Gayā resides to perform worship of Kṛṣṇa. Agastya Kuṇḍa is also here. Gayā Kuṇḍa's southern bank is known as Agastya Ghāṭa. Bathing here and performing *tarpaṇa* (offering of water to the demigods, *ṛṣis* and forefathers) and *piṇḍa-dāna* in the month of Āśvina on Kṛṣṇa-pakṣa (the dark moon) are highly praised.

Prayāga Kuṇḍa

Tīrtharāja Prayāga worshipped Śrī Kṛṣṇa here. The two *kuṇḍas* Prayāga and Puṣkara lie together here.

Dvārakā Kuṇḍa

Śrī Kṛṣṇa came to Braja from Dvārakā and resided here in tents with His queens.

Dvārakā Kuṇḍa, Gomatī Kuṇḍa, Māna Kuṇḍa and Balabhadra Kuṇḍa

These four *kuṇḍas* are situated alongside each other.

Nārada Kuṇḍa

This is Nārada's place of *ārādhana*. Devarṣi Nārada became impatient here while singing about Kṛṣṇa's sweet pastimes. *Bhakti-ratnakāra* tells:

*dekhaha nārada kuṇḍa nārada eī khāne
haila mahā adhairya kṛṣṇera līlā gāne*

“See this Nārada Kuṇḍa, where Nārada lost his patience while singing about Śrī Kṛṣṇa’s pastimes.”

Manokāmanā Kuṇḍa

This *kuṇḍa* and Kāma Sarovara are situated together between Vimala Kuṇḍa and Yaśodā Kuṇḍa. By bathing here, all desires of the heart are fulfilled. The *Skanda Purāṇa* states:

*tatra kāmāsaro rājan! / gopikāramaṇaṁ saraḥ
tatra tīrtha sahasrāṇi / sarāṁsī ca pṛthak-pṛthak*

“Gopikāramaṇa Kāma Sarovara is in Kāmyavana. There, all desires of the heart are fulfilled. Thousands of other *tīrthas* are present in that same Kāmyavana.”

Setubandha Sarovara

On the order of the *gopīs*, Śrī Kṛṣṇa, in the mood of Śrī Rāma, had the monkeys construct a bridge (*setu*) here. Even today, one can see the ruins of this bridge of rocks (*setu-bandha*) in the *sarovara*. Rāmeśvara Mahādeva presides north of this *kuṇḍa*. He was installed by Śrī Kṛṣṇa, when He assumed the mood of Śrī Rāma. Laṅkāpurī, as a hillock, is situated to the south of the *kuṇḍa* across from Rāmeśvara Mahādeva.

One day, the supremely playful Śrī Kṛṣṇa was sitting in the shade under the trees on the northern bank of this *kuṇḍa*, together with the *gopīs*, and was joking and laughing with *vinodinī* Śrī Rādhikā. At that time, many monkeys from nearby places descended from the trees, being attracted by Kṛṣṇa’s *rūpa-mādhurī*, His sweet beauty. They offered *pra-ṇāmas* at His lotus feet, sang in joy, jumped and danced. Several monkeys took very long leaps from trees on the southern bank of the *kuṇḍa* and landed near His lotus feet. Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa praised the bravery of those monkeys. Watching this wonderful *līlā* charmed the *gopīs*. They began to describe the astonishing *līlās* of Bhagavān Śrī Rāma-candra and said that He received help from monkeys. At that time, Lalitājī said, “We have heard that in Tretā-yuga the greatly powerful Hanumānjī crossed the ocean with one jump, but today we are seeing with our own eyes monkeys also cross this *sarovara* in a single jump.”

Hearing this, Kṛṣṇa proudly declared, “Do you know, I was Śrī Rāma in Tretā-yuga. I performed all these *līlās* as Rāma.”

Lalitā praised the amazing *līlās* of Śrī Rāmacandra and said, “You are a liar. You were never Rāma. Such bravery is impossible for You.”

Śrī Kṛṣṇa smiled and replied, “You don’t believe Me, but I did take the form of Rāma, and I married Sītā after breaking the bow of Śiva in Janakapurī. On the order of My father, I roamed through Citrakūṭa and Daṇḍakāraṇya with bow in hand, together with Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa, where I killed cruel and tyrannical demons. Thereafter, I wandered from forest to forest in separation from Sītā,

destroyed Rāvaṇa and Laṅkāpurī with the help of the monkeys, and then returned to Ayodhyā. Now I carry a *vaṁśī*, roam from forest to forest tending and grazing the cows, and perform pastimes with My beloved Śrī Rādhikā in the company of you *gopīs*. Previously, when I came as Rāma, My bow and arrow made the three worlds tremble. Now, however, all living beings, both moving and non-moving, are becoming maddened by the sweet sound of My *veṇu*.”

Smilingly, Lalitājī said, “We do not believe mere words. If You can show some valour like that of Śrī Rāma, then we may believe You. Śrī Rāmacandrajī arranged for a bridge to be constructed by bears and monkeys so that He could cross an ocean one hundred *yojanas* wide with His entire army. If You can get these monkeys to construct a bridge over this small *sarovara*, then we may believe You.”

Hearing Lalitā’s words, Śrī Kṛṣṇa assembled all the monkeys in a moment by sounding His *veṇu*. He ordered them to construct a bridge over the *sarovara* using flat stones. On the order of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, thousands of monkeys immediately and eagerly started to help build the bridge, bringing stones from distant places. This occurred right before the *gopīs*’ eyes. Śrī Kṛṣṇa then constructed the bridge with His own hands with the stones brought by the monkeys. He installed Rāmeśvara Mahādeva at the start of the bridge, on the northern side of the *sarovara*. These places can still be seen to this day. This *kuṇḍa* is also called Laṅkā Kuṇḍa.

Luk-lukī Kuṇḍa

Luk-lukī Kuṇḍa is another site of Śrī Kṛṣṇa’s water-sports (*jal-kṛīḍā*), and is therefore also known as Jal-kṛīḍā Kuṇḍa. While grazing the cows, Kṛṣṇa would sometimes leave His play with the *sakhās* for a while to meet with the *gopīs* in this lovely, secluded place. Kṛṣṇa played hide-and-seek here with the *braja-ramaṇīs*. The *gopīs* closed their eyes, and Kṛṣṇa hid in a cave in a nearby hill. The *sakhīs* searched for Him everywhere, but were unable to find Him. They became very worried. “Where could Kṛṣṇa have gone, leaving us behind?” they thought, and they began to meditate on Him. That place where they performed *dhyāna* (meditation) on Kṛṣṇa is called Dhyāna Kuṇḍa, and the cave (*kandarā*) in which Kṛṣṇa was hiding is called Luk-luka Kandarā.

Caraṇa Pahāḍī

After Śrī Kṛṣṇa entered the cave known as Luk-luka Kandarā, He appeared on top of the hill in which the cave is buried and played on His sweet flute. The sound of the flute broke the *sakhīs*’ meditation on Him. They looked up to see their beloved playing His flute on the hill, and eagerly ran there to meet Him. The sound of the flute somewhat melted the hill, and Śrī Kṛṣṇa’s footprints manifested there. Even today, one can see these footprints very clearly. The stones on the nearby hill where the *sakhās* were playing and the calves were grazing also melted, leaving impressions of their feet and hooves, which are still clearly visible today, even after 5,000 years.

Vihvala Kuṇḍa

This *kuṇḍa* lies near Caraṇa Pahādī, as do the *kuṇḍas* of five *sakhās*. The *gopīs* became overwhelmed (*vihvala*) with *prema* here upon hearing the sound of Kṛṣṇa's flute. This place has therefore become famous as Vihvala Kuṇḍa. The *kuṇḍas* of the five *sakhās* are named Raṅgīlā, Chabīlā, Jakīlā, Matīlā and Datīlā Kuṇḍa. They are all situated near Agrāvalī Grāma.

Yaśodharā Kuṇḍa

This *kuṇḍa* is also named Ghoṣarānī Kuṇḍa. Ghoṣarānī was Yaśodhara Gopa's daughter. Yaśodhara Gopa gave her hand in marriage here. This is the *kuṇḍa* of Śrī Kṛṣṇa's maternal grandmother, Pāṭalā-devī.

Śrī Prabodhānanda Sarasvatī's bhajana-sthalī

Near Luk-lukī Kuṇḍa, in a secluded, marvellous location is Śrī Prabodhānanda Sarasvatī's place of *bhajana*. Śrī Prabodhānandajī was the *guru* and paternal uncle of Śrī Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmī. He was a transcendental poet, well-versed in all the *śāstras*. *Rādhā-rasa-sudhā-nidhi*, *Śrī Navadvīpa Śataka* and *Śrī Vṛndāvana Śataka* are some of the works of this *mahāpuruṣa*. In his famous *Gaura-gaṇoddeśa-dīpika*, Śrī Kavi Karṇapūra has mentioned that Prabodhānanda Sarasvatī is the very talented Tuṅgavidyā Sakhī, one of the *aṣṭa-sakhīs* in *kṛṣṇa-līlā*.

After Prabodhānanda heard Śrīman Mahāprabhu speak *kṛṣṇa-kathā* in Śrī Raṅgam, he left the Śrī-sampradāya to become a follower of Mahāprabhu. When Mahāprabhu left Śrī Raṅgam, Prabodhānanda came to Braja and stayed for some time at this secluded place where he performed *bhajana*. In his last days, he came to Kālīya Daha in Vṛndāvana where he entered *nitya-līlā* while performing *bhajana*. Today, one can take *darśana* of his *bhajana* and *samādhi-sthalīs* there.

Phisalanī Śilā

This stone slide is situated on Indrasena Parvata near Kalāvatā Grāma. While grazing the cows, Śrī Kṛṣṇa and the *sakhās* used to slide here. Śrīmatī Rādhikā sometimes used to slide here also, along with Her *sakhīs*. To this day, the boys of the nearby village take great pleasure in sliding down this hill while grazing their cows. Pilgrims come to take *darśana* of this slide, where many joyful episodes took place.

Vyomāsura's cave

Just near the slide, in the middle of the hill is the cave of Vyomāsura. Kṛṣṇa killed Vyomāsura here. This cave is also referred to as Medhāvī Muni's cave because Medhāvī Muni worshipped Kṛṣṇa here.

The *caraṇa-cihna*, or footprint, of Śrī Baladeva Prabhu lies nearby, at the foot of the hill. When Śrī Kṛṣṇa was killing Vyomāsura, the earth began to tremble, so Baladevajī pressed down on the earth with His foot and thus stabilised it. His *caraṇa-cihna* can still be seen today.

Once, Kṛṣṇa came to this place while grazing His cows. The forest was filled with green grass, which the cows happily ate. Without any care, Śrī Kṛṣṇa and the *sakhās* began to play a game of ‘cops and robbers’. Some *sakhās* pretended to be sheep while others pretended to be their keepers. Still others took on the role of thieves and stole the sheep. Kṛṣṇa played the judge. The owners of the sheep filed a lawsuit with the judge against the thieves. Śrī Kṛṣṇa called both parties before Him and proceeded to consider the case. All the cowherd boys were thus deeply absorbed in their play.

Intending to kill Kṛṣṇa, Vyomāsura, one of Kāṁsa’s spies, entered the group disguised as a *sakhā* and became one of the thieves. He stole all the *sakhās* who were playing the part of sheep and hid them in this cave. Śrī Kṛṣṇa looked around and wondered, “Where have all our *sakhās* gone?” Recognising Vyomāsura as a demon in disguise, He understood that this was his work. He therefore caught him and killed him. Kṛṣṇa and the *sakhās* who were playing the sheeps’ owners then released the other *sakhās* from the cave in the hill. This *līlā* has been described in the Tenth Canto of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*.

Bhojana Thālī

Some distance from Vyomāsura’s cave is Bhojana Thālī, and near Bhojana Thālī is Kṣīrasāgara, or Kṛṣṇa Kuṇḍa. After killing Vyomāsura, Śrī Kṛṣṇa bathed in this *kuṇḍa* and ate here with the *gopa sakhās*. The marks of a plate (*thāla*) and of cups are still visible on the hill where they ate (*bhojana kiyā*). Śrī Kṛṣṇa’s *simhāsana* is also nearby. After eating, Kṛṣṇa played with the *sakhās* on a nearby hill, where they used a stone as a musical instrument. This place can also still be found today. To this day, various sweet sounds can still be produced by playing on this stone, which is known as a *bājana-śilā*.

Nearby is Śāntanu Kuṇḍa, the place where Śāntanu performed austerities. Gupta Gaṅgā, Naimiṣa Tīrtha, Haridvāra Kuṇḍa, Avantikā Kuṇḍa, Matsya Kuṇḍa, Govinda Kuṇḍa, Nṛsimha Kuṇḍa and Prahlāda Kuṇḍa are also all situated here. On the hill at Bhojana Thālī is the place where Śrī Parasurāma performed austerities and worshipped Bhagavān.

Deities of the Śrī Gauḍīya Sampradāya that are present in Kāmyavana include Śrī Govindajī, Śrī Vṛndā-devī, Śrī Gopināthajī and Śrī Madana-Mohanajī. Deities of the Śrī Vallabha Sampradāya include Śrī Kṛṣṇa Candramājī, Navanīta Priyājī and Śrī Madana-Mohanajī.

The gates of Kāmyavana

Kāmyavana has seven gates:

- 1) Ḍīg Gate – This gate is situated in the south-eastern part of Kāmyavana. The road here leads to Ḍīg (Dīrghapura) and Bharatpura.
- 2) Laṅkā Gate – This gate is the road to Setubandha Kuṇḍa, which runs south from Kāmyavana Gaon.

3) Āmera Gate – This gate is the road to Caraṇa Pahādī, which runs south-west from Kāmavana Gaon.

4) Devī Gate – This gate is the road to Vaiṣṇavī-devī in the Punjāb, which runs west from Kāmavana Gaon.

5) Delhi Gate – This gate lies in the north of Kāmyavana, and the road to Delhi runs from here.

6) Rāmajī Gate – This gate is situated in the north-eastern side of the village, and the road to Nandagaon runs from here.

7) Mathurā Gate – This gate is situated in the east of the village, and the road to Mathurā via Varsānā runs from here.

Pastime-places Visited After Parikramā of Kāmyavana

Dhuleḍā Gaon

Every day, Śrī Kṛṣṇa and the *sakhās* take the cows out to graze, leaving the barns in the morning and returning in the evening. At that time, dust kicked up by the feet of *lākhs* of *sakhās* and by the hooves of countless cows rises like a cloud filling the whole sky. By seeing this dust (*dhūla*), the Brajabāsīs would at once know that Kṛṣṇa and the *sakhās* were either going cow-grazing or returning home. The village of Dhuleḍā, where the whole sky would become full of this dust, is situated east of Kāmyavana.

Ūdhā

When Uddhavajī was making his way to Nandagaon to deliver Kṛṣṇa's message from Mathurā, he stopped here to rest for some time. This is why this place received the name Ūdhā.

Āṭora

Śrī Kṛṣṇa happily played here with His *prāṇapriya sakhās* like Dāma, Śrīdāma, Sudāma, Vasudāma, Stoka Kṛṣṇa, Kokila, Bhṛṅga, Ujjvala, Arjuna, Subala, and Madhumaṅgala throughout the eight *praharas* of the day. The word *āṭora* means 'to remain engaged in the pleasure of playing games for all eight *praharas* of the day (*āṭho praharas*)'. This place has therefore been named Āṭora.

Bajerā

This village, situated two miles east of Kāmyavana, is the birthplace of the twin sisters Raṅgadevī and Sudevī, who are two of the eight principal *sakhīs* (*aṣṭa-sakhīs*). Their father is Raṅgasāra Gopa and their mother is Karuṇā Gopī. Raṅga-devī's husband is Vakrakhana Gopa, and Sudevī's husband is Vakrakhana Gopa's younger brother. Both sisters live in Jāvaṭa with Śrīmatī Rādhikā and always serve Her.

Sunaharā Gaon

This village lies four miles east of Kāmyavana and two miles from Bajerā Gaon. Wearing a golden necklace, Śrīmatī Rādhikājī performed *pūjā* of Mahādevajī here. Even to this day, this village is called Sunaharā or Sunerā, meaning ‘golden necklace’. This village is also called Sunaharā Gaon because it is established up on Suvarṇācala Parvata.

Kadamba-khaṇḍī

Near Sunerā Gaon, to the south-west, is a vast *kadamba-khaṇḍī*, or grove of *kadamba* trees. This is the location of a *rāsa-maṇḍala* and of Ratna Kuṇḍa. In the month of Bhādra on the Caturdaśī of the bright moon, *rāsa-līlā* is enacted here according to *būḍhī-līlā*.

Nābhājī’s place of *bhajana* is also in the *kadamba-khaṇḍī*. Nābhājī’s previous name was Catura-cintāmaṇi, and he was born in Paya Gaon in Braja. From childhood, he performed *bhajana* in this isolated grove of *kadamba* trees, being detached from the material world. He was a great ascetic. It is said that he would remain absorbed in meditation on different pastimes. Once, while being thus absorbed, he began to pick flowers for the service of Priyā-Priyatama. He had very long matted hair, which on this occasion became entangled in a thorny bush (*hīṇsa*). He therefore remained standing in that same position for three days. Kīśora and Kīśorī appeared there and started disentangling his hair from the bush.

“Who are you?” Nābhājī asked.

Kīśorījī smiled, indicating with Her eyes that Śyāma-sundara Himself was disentangling his matted locks. Then, suddenly, They both disappeared. Nābhājī’s life had become successful. He rolled about on the ground, weeping. He later came to Vṛndāvana to reside at Vihāra Ghāṭa.

Ūścāgaon

This village, situated three miles east of Sunerā Gaon and one mile west of Varsānā, is the village of Lalitājī. *Braja-bhakti-vilāsa* quotes *Viṣṇu-rahasya*, which describes this place as follows:

sakhī-giri-parvato’sti tat-pārśve skhalinī śilā-mandiraṁ, tatraiva lalitā-vivāha-sthalaṁ tat-parvatasya dakṣiṇa-pārśve triveṇī-tīrthaḥ, tan-madhye rāsa-maṇḍalaṁ tat-pārśve sakhī-kūpaṁ, tad-uttara-pārśve śilā-prṣṭha-sthaḥ śrī-yugala-baladeva-mūrtiḥ hīṇsa-vṛkṣād adha-sthaḥ.

“Nearby is Sakhīgiri Parvata, on which Phisalanī Śilā (a stone slide), Lalitā-vivāha Maṇḍapa (the wedding pavilion of Lalitā) and Sakhī Kūpa are situated. Also nearby are Triveṇī Kūpa, a *rāsa-maṇḍala*, a deity of Dāūjī in a *hīṇsa kuṣja*, Gopī Puṣkariṇī, Deha Kuṇḍa, and other pastime-places.”

Sakhīgiri Parvata

Lalitā and other *sakhīs*, being attracted and enamoured by Brajendra-nandana Śrī Kṛṣṇa’s qualities as a *nāyaka*, such as *dhīra-lalita*, performed

rāsa-vilāsa and various other pastimes with Him around and on top of this hill.³

Phisalanī Śilā

This stone slide is situated on Sakhīgiri Parvata, and is adjacent to Lalitā-vivāha-sthala. Lalitā and other *sakhīs* used to slide here. Even today, one can see the mark of the slide on the hill, as well as the markings of *altā* (red lac) from the *gopīs*' feet. Nearby, on the northern part of the hilltop, are some astonishing *śilās* that appear multicoloured when the sun's rays shine on them. The *gopīs* would also paint wonderful pictures (*citra*) on these *śilās*, and therefore these *śilās* are called *citra śilās*. One who faithfully searches and prays on this hilltop can sometimes even see the *gopīs*' footprints there.

Lalitā-vivāha Maṇḍapa

This is Lalitā's wedding pavilion. The *gopīs* performed Lalitā's wedding ceremony with seven-year-old Śrī Kṛṣṇa here. One day, Lalitā and the *sakhīs* were sitting with *rasika* Kṛṣṇa and talking sweetly with Him. Upon the indication of Śrīmatī Rādhikā, Viśākhā and some other *sakhīs* tied Śrī Śyāmasundara's *pītāmbara* to the corner of Śrī Lalitā's veil. Raṅgadevī and other *sakhīs* started to sing wedding songs while Tuṅgavidyā and others uttered the wedding *mantras*. The remaining *sakhīs* showered flowers on Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Lalitā. Becoming somewhat suspicious, Lalitā quickly stood up and went to run away, but she was unable to do so because of the knot. The *gopīs* surrounded the couple and with great celebration held a big festival. This place was named Lalitā-vivāha-sthala after this *līlā*.

Gopī Puṣkariṇī

This *sarovara* is situated at Sakhīgiri Parvata. Lalitā and other *sakhīs* used to play many kinds of water sports (*jal-kṛīḍā*) while taking bath in this *sarovara*. This place is rare to attain even for the demigods. Once, while playing here, the *sakhīs* collected *badrī* fruit and arranged them in the form of a mortar (*okhal*). This place is still famous by the name Badrī-kā-okhal.

Sakhī Kūpa

This place lies near Sakhīgiri Parvata. Once, Lalitā and the other *sakhīs* were eagerly awaiting Kṛṣṇa's arrival. Having remained restless for a long time, they now became very thirsty. They therefore dug a well (*kūpa*) with their own hands. Just as they began to drink its water, Kṛṣṇa arrived, dressed in splendid attire. An astonishing exchange then took place between Kṛṣṇa and the *gopīs*, in which the *gopīs*' mysterious words fully satisfied Him. This well is called Sakhī Kūpa because it was built by the *sakhīs*.

Triveṇī Kūpa

This well is situated some distance away on the right side of the path from Sakhīgiri Parvata to Ūṣcāgaon. Śrī Dāūjī and Lalitājī daily bathed in Triveṇī

Kūpa. Once, in the month of Māgha (January to February), Lalitā and the other *sakhīs* desired to take bath in Trivenī Saṅgama, which is the confluence of the Gaṅgā, Yamunā and Sarasvatī Rivers. Śrī Kṛṣṇa therefore created this well for them with the tip of His flute, right before their eyes. Merely by His remembering them, the holy waters of Trivenī Saṅgama appeared in the well, and within a second the *gopīs* could take their bath. A person easily attains the fruit of taking bath in Trivenī even by putting the dust surrounding the well on his head, what to speak of actually bathing in the water of this well.

Dāūjī Mandira

A large deity of Dāūjī resides nearby, to the east of Trivenī Kūpa, in the middle of dense thorny *hīṁsa* bushes. This *mandira* was built by Rājā Ṭoḍaramala on the order of Śrī Nārāyaṇa Bhaṭṭajī.

Śrī Nārāyaṇa Bhaṭṭajī was a Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava *ācārya*. He took birth in the state of Madhurāpattana in South India. His father, Śrī Bhaṭṭajī of the Bhaṭṭabhāskara Tailaṅga *brāhmaṇa-paramparā* of that place, was famous for his erudition. Śrī Nārāyaṇa Bhaṭṭajī became detached from the material world at the age of fourteen and came to Braja around *saṁvat* 1602 (1546 A.D.). He was especially dedicated to Śrīmatī Rādhikā. It is well known that the present *śrī vigraha* in the Śrījī Mandira in Varsānā manifested as a result of the special prayers of Śrī Nārāyaṇa Bhaṭṭajī. These deities manifested on the second day of the bright moon in the month of Āṣāḍha (July) in *saṁvat* 1626 (1570 A.D.).

Śrī Nārāyaṇa Bhaṭṭajī had undivided *niṣṭhā* in Braja. In his famous work, *Braja-bhakti-vilāsa*, he describes all the pastime-places of Kṛṣṇa in Braja in great detail. Śrī Nārāyaṇa Bhaṭṭa inaugurated the enactment of *rāsa-līlā*, which is still being carried out today. The *pūjārīs* and *brāhmaṇas* of Śrījī Mandira, Varsānā, take initiation from the descendants of Nārāyaṇa Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmī. Bhaṭṭajī's main engagement was serving the Dāūjī Mandira in Ūṣcāgaon.

Lalitā-sthala (Aṭorā Parvata)

This hill is situated east of Deha Kuṇḍa, and adjacent to and west of the Dāūjī Mandira. Ūṣcāgaon is established on this hill, and there one will find the balcony (*aṭārī*) of Lalitājī and other places of her childhood pastimes.

Lalitā Sakhī's parents are Viśobha Gopa and Śārādī Gopī. She was married in Jāvaṭa; her husband is Bhairon Gopa. Lalitājī is the foremost of Śrīmatī Rādhikā's *aṣṭa-sakhīs* and the main leader of Her three groups of *sakhīs*, *dāsīs* and *dūtīs*.⁴ Lalitājī is also known as Anurādhā because she possesses all the *bhāvas* and qualities of Śrīmatī Rādhikā. Her nature is *vāmā prakharā* (leftist and harsh) and she is expert in all varieties of *sevā* to Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, such as dressing, decorating, performing magic, making the bed, and arranging meetings between Them. Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Śrīmatī Rādhā Themselves cannot overrule her.

Deha Kuṇḍa

This *kuṇḍa* is situated to the west just below Lalitā's birth-place. Once, Śrī Rādhā and Śrī Kṛṣṇa together with the *sakhīs* were taking bath here during a festival. As they were dressing themselves after bathing, a poor *brāhmaṇa* came there and in a piteous voice addressed Śrī Kṛṣṇa, "I have a daughter of marriageable age, but due to lack of money, I cannot offer her to a suitable husband. Therefore, please give me some wealth."

Śrī Kṛṣṇa thought, "Rādhā is My only and entire wealth. But for Her, I possess nothing else of value." So He told the *brāhmaṇa*, "I want to give you My entire fortune, not just a little money." He then pointed towards Śrī Rādhājī and said, "She is My entire property and wealth. Please accept Her."

When the poor *brāhmaṇa* heard this, he began to beat his head in sadness. He said, "He Vrajeśānandana! I could not even arrange a suitable husband for my one daughter; how will I ever be able to marry off two? This is disastrous for me. What should I do now?" The *brāhmaṇa* only wanted gold. Understanding this, Śrī Kṛṣṇa put Priyājī on one side of a scale and Her weight in gold on the other. He then gave all this gold to the *brāhmaṇa*. Śrīmatījī also became pleased with this arrangement, which relieved Her of much trouble. The *brāhmaṇa* was given an abundance of gold and very happily returned to his home, where he completed the marriage of his daughter with great celebration.

It is also said that once a wealthy person was suffering severely from leprosy. He came here, took bath in this *kuṇḍa*, and donated ten *karṣa* (160 grams) of gold to qualified *brāhmaṇas*. After some time, his disease left him.

Veṇīśaṅkara Mahādeva

On the bank of Deha Kuṇḍa is Veṇīśaṅkara Mahādeva, whom the *gopīs* installed with their own hands. He who bathes in this *kuṇḍa* with faith and takes *darśana* of Veṇīśaṅkara Mahādeva gets the same result as that of taking bath in the Trivenī Saṅgama. All his problems are eliminated and he attains pure *bhakti* for Kṛṣṇa.

Chapter 9

Varsānā

(Vṛṣabhānupura)

Varsānā is the pastime-place of Śrī Kṛṣṇa's beloved Śrīmatī Rādhikā. Lying at the heart of this village is a multitude of the Divine Couple's sweet and secret amorous pastimes (*sarasa-kelī*), together with Their *bhāvas* and desires. The Vaiṣṇava community reveres Varsānā. This venerable land with *sarovaras*, *kuṇḍas*, gardens, and forests – like Gahvaravana, Sāṅkarī Khor and other pastime-places – reminds one of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa's various specific *līlās*. In Braja, the grass, small shrubs, creepers, trees, animals, birds, insects, snakes and so forth are all composed of *sac-cid-ānanda*. They assist Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa in Their *līlās* and are very dear to Them. It is said in *śāstra* that even *siddha mahā-puruṣas* like Brahmā and Śaṅkara repeatedly pray to

attain a birth like theirs so that they too may be able to serve Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa.

For instance, Śrīla Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī says in *Śrī Vraja-vilāsa-stava* (verse 102):

*yat kiṣcit tṛṇa-gulma-kīkaṭa-mukhaṁ goṣṭhe samasta hi tat
sarvānandamaya mukunda-dayitaṁ līlānukūlam param
śāstrair eva muhur muhuḥ sphuṭam idaṁ niṣṭaṅkitaṁ yāścayā
brahmāder api sa-sprhena tad idaṁ mayā vandyate*

“All the grass, shrubs, insects and other creatures found in Braja are very dear to He who is the very embodiment of all transcendental bliss, Śrī Mukunda, and they assist in His pastimes. All the scriptures have repeatedly established this fact, and devotees ranging from Brahmā to Uddhava have expressed a desire to take birth in Braja amongst these species. For these reasons, I worship all the creatures who reside in Braja.”

Varsānā’s original name is Vṛṣabhānupura. Vṛṣabhānu Mahārāja, the father of Śrīmatī Rādhikā, lived here with his family. Varsānā is situated fourteen miles west of Govardhana and six miles east of Kāmyavana. According to the *Varāha* and *Padma Purāṇas*, Brahmā pleased Śrī Hari at the end of Satya-yuga by performing arduous worship. Brahmā then asked for the following boon: “Please perform Your sweet pastimes with the *braja-gopīs* on top of me and allow me to take *darśana* of these *līlās*. Please make me successful, especially in the rainy season by performing *līlās* like *jhūlana* (swing pastimes) and in spring by performing *līlās* like *phāga* (*holī*).” ¹

Pleased with Brahmā, Śrī Hari instructed him, “Go to Vṛṣabhānupura and take the form of a hill there. In that form you will be able to take *darśana* of all Our sweet pastimes.” ² And so it happened that Brahmā assumed the form of a hill at this place in Braja and fulfilled his cherished desire.

Pastime-places in the Area of Varsānā

The *parikramā* of Varsānā is four miles long. *Braja-bhakti-vilāsa*, quoting *Padma Purāṇa*, describes the characteristics of Vṛṣabhānupura as follows:

*viṣṇu-brahma-nāmānau parvatau dvau parasparau. dakṣiṇa-pārśve
brahma-nāma-parvataḥ vāma-pārśve viṣṇu-nāma-parvataḥ. brahma-
parvatopari śrī-rādhā-kṛṣṇa-mandiraṁ, śrī-rādhā-kṛṣṇa-darśanaṁ, tad-
adho-bhāge śrī-vṛṣabhānu-gopa-mandiraṁ, vṛṣabhānu-kīrti-śrīdāmā-
darśanaṁ, tat-pārśve lalitā-śakhināṁ priyā-sahitānāṁ mandiraṁ rādhādi-
nava-sakhināṁ darśanam. brahma-parvatopari dāna-mandiraṁ, hiṇḍola-
sthalaṁ, mayūraḥ-ṭhalaṁ, viṣṇu-brahma-nāmnor-ubhayoḥ sākṣarī
khorī-sthalaṁ. brahma-parvatopari śrī-rādhā-mandiraṁ agre līlā-nṛtya-
maṇḍalam. viṣṇu-parvatopari-sthaṁ śrī-kṛṣṇā-mandiraṁ agre līlā-nṛtya-
mandiraṁ, tat-pārśve vilāsa-mandiraṁ tat-pārśve gahvarvanaṁ tad-
adhaḥsthale rāsa-maṇḍalam, rādhā-sarovari dohanī-kuṇḍa, tat-samīpe
citralekhyayā kṛta-mayūra-saraḥ.*

“According to the *Padma Purāṇa*, two hills face each other here – one is Viṣṇu and the other is Brahma. Viṣṇu Parvata is on the left and Brahma Parvata is on the right. On top of Brahma Parvata is a *mandira* of Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa. Close by to the north, on the lower side of this hill, is the palace of Mahārāja Vṛṣabhānu, where one can have *darśana* of Vṛṣabhānu Mahārāja, Śrīmatī Kīrtidā Mahārānī, Śrīdāma and Śrīmatī Rādhikā. Nearby is a temple of Śrī Lalitā, in which one can have *darśana* of Rādhikā along with nine *sakhīs*.

“Also on top of Brahma Parvata are Dāna Mandira, the place of a swing (*hiṇḍolā*), Mayūra Kuṭī, a *rāsa-maṇḍala*, and a temple of Śrīmatī Rādhājī. Further on between the two hills is Sāṅkarī Khor. Near Sāṅkarī Khor is Vilāsa Mandira, and next to Vilāsa Mandira is Gahvaravana. Within Gahvaravana are Rādhā Sarovara and a *rāsa-maṇḍala*, and nearby is Dohanī Kuṇḍa. Very close to this *kuṇḍa* is Mayūra Sarovara, which was constructed by Citralekhā.” Bhānu Sarovara is also nearby, and on its bank is Vrajeśvara, a *mūrti* of Mahārudra. On its left side is Kīrti Sarovara.

There are four *sarovaras* around Varsānā: (1) Vṛṣabhānu Kuṇḍa in the east, (2) Kīrtidā Kuṇḍa in the north-east, (3) Vihāra Kuṇḍa (later named Tilaka Kuṇḍa) in the south-west, and (4) Dohanī Kuṇḍa in the south, south-west of the village of Ciksaulī.

Sāṅkarī Khor lies north of Ciksaulī, and on Viṣṇu Parvata, east of Sāṅkarī Khor, is Vilāsa Gaṛh. This is the location of a *rāsa-maṇḍala*. Near Vilāsa Mandira is where Rādhikā, as a child, played with the sand, building palaces and so on. West of Sāṅkarī Khor, on top of the mountain, is Dāna Gaṛh; and south-west of Sāṅkarī Khor and west of the village of Ciksaulī are Gahvaravana and Gahvara Kuṇḍa. Mayūra Kuṭī is to the right when entering Gahvaravana. On the top of the hill, south-west of Gahvara-vana, are Māna Gaṛh and Māna Mandira; and below and nearby is the village of Mānapurā. North of Māna Gaṛh is the *mandira* of the Mahārāja of Jaipura, and north of that *mandira* is Śrījī Mandira.

Just below Śrījī Mandira, still on the hill, one comes to the *mandira* of Brahmājī and the palace of Śrīmatī Rādhikā’s paternal grandfather, Mahībhānu. Below that lies the village of Varsānā. West of Varsānā is Mukṭā Kuṇḍa, or Ratna Kuṇḍa.

Among the places listed above, we will describe those where prominent *līlās* took place.

Vṛṣabhānu Kuṇḍa

This *kuṇḍa* is situated east of the village of Varsānā. Mahārāja Vṛṣabhānu used to take his bath in this *kuṇḍa* every morning. He would also perform *āhnikā* and other morning duties here. It has been described that in a previous *kalpa* Mahārāja Vṛṣabhānu found Rādhikājī in this *kuṇḍa* while bathing. She was a newly-born baby girl playing on a lotus flower in the water.

This charming *sarovara* is surrounded on all sides by *jīyala* trees. Sometimes, Śrīmatī Rādhikā would bathe here and enjoy water sports (*jal-kṛīḍā*) together

with Her *sakhīs*. *Rasika* Brajendra-nandana Śrī Kṛṣṇa would also bathe here, but at another *ghāṭa*. He would then dive under the water, catch hold of the *gopīs*' feet, and again emerge on His side of the *kuṇḍa*. Sometimes, Nandanandana Śrī Kṛṣṇa would also sport with these *gopīs*, playing hide and seek. This *kuṇḍa* is named after Mahārāja Vṛṣabhānu.

Sāṅkarī Khor

This narrow passage-way lies between Brahma Parvata and Viṣṇu Parvata, and both *gopas* and *gopīs* would make their way along it. After milking the cows, the *gopas* would carry the milk on *kāmvars*. A *kāmvar* is a bamboo stick with ropes attached to each end for carrying loads. They used this pathway to cross from one side of the hills to the other. *Raṅgīle* means 'showy', 'merry' or 'jovial'. *Raṅgīle* Kṛṣṇa would plunder the milk, yoghurt and butter of the *raṅgīlī gopīs* here. Every year in the month of Bhādra on Śuklā Trayodaśī (the thirteenth day of the bright moon), *būdhī-līlā* is enacted here, as inaugurated by Śrī Nārāyaṇa Bhaṭṭa.

At this *dāna-ghāṭī*, Śrī Kṛṣṇa and His *gopa* friends would become tax collectors and demand milk, yoghurt and butter from the *gopīs*. When the *gopīs* refused to give any tax, Kṛṣṇa would forcibly plunder and relish their milk products.

The *gopīs*, being tired of these daily encounters, decided one day to retaliate strongly. They decided that on a chosen day they would all hide in the caves and dense *kuṣjas* on the hill on both sides of the narrow pathway. A few *gopīs* would then cross Sāṅkarī Khor carrying pots of milk, yoghurt and butter on their heads. The plan was that the moment Kṛṣṇa and His *sakhās* would stop them and try to plunder their load, the *gopīs* would call out to their friends hiding nearby, who would at once descend from their hideouts. Then, under the leadership of Lalitā, they would teach Kṛṣṇa and His *sakhās* a good lesson.

And so it happened that the next day thousands and thousands of *gopīs* divided into groups and hid themselves in the dense *kuṣjas* and large caves around Sāṅkarī Khor. Then, as usual, a few *gopīs* placed pots of milk and yoghurt on their heads and made their way towards Sāṅkarī Khor. Kṛṣṇa, Madhumaṅgala and the other *sakhās* obstructed their path and forcibly began to plunder their milk and yoghurt. At once, these *gopīs* signalled the *gopīs* who were hiding, and a wonderful *līlā* took place. Five to ten *gopīs* forcefully caught hold of Kṛṣṇa. Another five to ten caught hold of Madhumaṅgala, and further groups captured Subala, Arjuna, Lavaṅga and the other *sakhās*. They slapped their cheeks till they were swollen. They then tied their *śikhās* to the branches of the trees and asked them, "What pleasure is there in plundering our yoghurt? Will you ever do it again?" Madhumaṅgala folded his hands and prayed at the feet of Lalitā. "Please spare me. I was very hungry. I am a simple *brāhmaṇa* boy who fell under the influence of that fickle Kṛṣṇa. I shall never behave like this again." The *gopīs* thus taught the *sakhās* a lesson.

Śrīmatī Rādhikā, Viśākhā and some other *gopīs* had captured Kṛṣṇa. They slapped His cheeks a few times and then forcibly dressed Him like a woman with a blouse and *lahaṅgā* (skirt). They even put *sindūra* in the parting of His hair, bangles on His arms, anklets on His feet, and so on. They covered half His face with a veil, placed a pot of yoghurt on His head and began to make fun of Him by demanding tax on the yoghurt. From the top of the hill, Lalitā Sakhī aimed a stone at the pot of yoghurt on Kṛṣṇa's head, breaking it and drenching His whole body. All the *sakhīs* began to laugh and clap, and Śyāma felt very ashamed. "Will You dare to demand tax on our yoghurt ever again?" they asked. "Hold your ears and vow, 'From today, I will never try to tax the *gopīs*' yoghurt.'" They forced Kṛṣṇa to repeat this.

To this day, this *līlā* is enacted here annually on the occasion of Rādhāṣṭamī, the appearance day of Śrīmatī Rādhikā, in the dramatic tradition of *būḍhī-līlā*.

Dāna Gaṛh

This beautiful place is on top of Brahmācala Parvata (Brahma Parvata). One day, *rasika* Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Subala Sakhā were sitting here as tax collectors, eagerly awaiting the arrival of Śrīmatī Rādhikā and Her friends, who were to pass this way carrying various articles of worship on the pretext of going to perform Sūrya-pūja. Upon seeing Her, Śrī Kṛṣṇa obstructed Her path and rebuked Her, saying, "Who are You? And where are You going?"

Śrīmatī Rādhikā answered, "Don't You know who we are?" and She fearlessly continued forward.

Kṛṣṇa and Subala Sakhā again obstructed Her way. Kṛṣṇa said, "Don't You know that I have been appointed by the king of this state to collect taxes here? You cannot pass without paying tax. Every day, You carelessly strut through here carrying a variety of valuable items, and You never pay tax. Halt! Pay the tax and then You may pass."

Viśākhā then spoke in a stern voice: "This is Rādhikā's kingdom. Vṛṣabhānu-nandinī Śrīmatī Rādhikā is Vṛndā-vaneśvarī, not anyone else. How have You become the tax collector here without receiving Her permission? Your offence is inexcusable. You will suffer a punishment for this."

Śrī Kṛṣṇa replied, "Don't talk so impudently. Kandarpa Deva (Cupid) is the king of this place. Every day you come and go through here, secretly carrying various expensive items, but you never pay any tax. This has angered Mahārāja Kandarpa, who has sent Me here. If you refuse to pay tax, then I will arrest you all and bring you before the king. You will have to suffer whatever punishment he hands down to you."

Hearing Kṛṣṇa's words, Viśākhā replied, "What can Your king do? Our queen is Vṛndā-vaneśvarī, the queen of Vṛndā-vana. In Her presence we fear no one. We are well acquaint-ed with the prowess of Your king, whose pride is shattered to pieces by the arrow-like side-long glances of Śrīmatī Rādhikā." Having said this, all the *sakhīs* moved forward, keeping Śrīmatī Rādhikā up front.

Kṛṣṇa stepped forward, stood in the middle of the narrow path known as Sāṅkarī Khor. “O impertinent women of Braja! You fearlessly cross this place daily, hiding various kinds of jewels. Today, without fail, you must pay the tax on these jewels.”

After such joking words and much laughter, Kiśora-Kiśorī enjoyed various amorous pastimes (*krīḍā-vilāsa*) in a solitary *keli-kuṣja*, and all the *sakhīs* became filled with *ānanda*. The temple here is called Dāna Mandira.³

Māna Gaṛh

Māna Gaṛh is a very attractive place on top of Brahmācala Parvata. Śrīmatī Rādhikā displayed *māna* here, but *rasika* Kṛṣṇa very skilfully broke it.

One day, Śrī Kṛṣṇa sent a message to Śrīmatī Rādhikā through Subala, who is one of His *priyanarma sakhās*, and through Vṛndā-devī that They should meet at a certain time. Kṛṣṇa was on His way when He suddenly met Padmā, Candrāvalī’s friend. Padmā described Śrīmatī Candrāvalī’s state of separation and repeatedly requested Him to meet with her. Śrī Kṛṣṇa could not ignore her plea, and He went to Candrāvalī’s *kuṣja* for what He intended to be a short time. However, He became so absorbed in sweet talks and playful pastimes with Candrāvalī that He forgot everything else, and the time for the arranged meeting with Śrīmatī Rādhikā elapsed. Meanwhile, one of Śrīmatī Rādhikā’s trained *sārīs* arrived on a tree in the same *kuṣja*. The *sārī* returned to Śrīmatī Rādhikā and told Her the details of Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Candrāvalī’s sweet conversations (*rasālapa*) and playful pastimes (*vilāsa*). Rādhikā became deeply distressed and went into a *māna* that was very difficult to break. Within Her heart, She firmly resolved to have no need for such an insolent Kṛṣṇa; so when Śrī Kṛṣṇa finally arrived, long after the appointed meeting time, Śrīmatī turned Her face away from Him.

Seeing Her unwavering *māna*, Śrī Kṛṣṇa tried to appease Her through all kinds of means and tricks, but Her *māna* would not break. Becoming hopeless and feeling sad, Kṛṣṇa left that place. On the road He met Viśākhā, who advised Him to disguise Himself as a new *sakhī* playing a *vīṇa*. He went to Śrīmatī Rādhikā together with Viśākhā, who introduced this new *sakhī* as Śyāmā Sakhī. Viśākhā profusely praised Śyāmā Sakhī’s ability to play the *vīṇa*, sing and perform many other skills. Śrīmatī Rādhikā seated this new *sakhī* next to Her with great honour and respect. Upon hearing Her exceptional singing, She became filled with *ānanda* and embraced Her. Śrīmatī Rādhikā recognised Her beloved merely by His touch; and as soon as She had done so, Her *māna* was broken. Surrounded by Her friends, She now became absorbed in *līlā-vilāsa* with Her *prāṇa-priyatama*.⁴

In Māna Gaṛh, one can also have *darsana* of Māna Mandira, a *jhūlā* (swing), a *rāsa-maṇḍala*, and Ratnākara Sarovara. Just near Māna Gaṛh to the south is the village of Mānapurā, which reminds one of all these *līlās*.

Mayūra Kūṭī

This place is situated on the top of Brahmācala Parvata. Here, one can have *darśana* of the *rāsa-maṇḍala* where Śrīmatī Rādhikā and Kṛṣṇa danced in the form of a peacock and peahen.

Once, Śrīmatī Rādhikā and Kṛṣṇa came to this place together with the *sakhīs*. Upon seeing them, the peacocks became overjoyed with ecstasy and began to dance. A light shower of rain fell from the cloud-filled sky. Nature had decorated herself with sixteen kinds of *śṛṅgāras* (deco-rations) and thirty-two *ābharaṇas* (ornaments), as if she was a beautiful and charming young woman. Śrī Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa could not check Their feelings. Taking the form of a peacock and peahen, They danced in an astonishing way along with the circle of peacocks and peahens. All the *sakhīs* were astounded to see Their skilful dancing. They began to sing different kinds of *rāgas*, like *malhāra*, which increased Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa's *ānanda*.⁵

Vilāsa Gaṛh

This place is situated on Viṣṇu Parvata. Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa performed many playful pastimes (*krīḍā-vilāsa*) here. Nearby is where Śrī Rādhā used to play in the dust together with Her *sakhīs*.

One day, Kumārī Rādhikā was playing in the dust with Her *sakhīs* when mischievous Kṛṣṇa suddenly arrived. The *sakhīs* forbade Him to come inside the *kuṣja*, but why would Śrī Kṛṣṇa obey them? He entered by force. At that moment, a dust-storm fell upon them by the wishes of the *devas*, and the entire sky became covered with dust. Nothing could be seen anywhere, and the *sakhīs* fearfully covered their eyes with their hands. Kṛṣṇa took this opportunity to embrace Kīsoṛī Rādhikā and kiss Her face. This *līlā* took place at the time of *vayaḥ sandhi*, or the period between childhood and youth. Today, Vilāsa Mandira is situated where this *līlā* took place.

The *Ādi Varāha Purāṇa* states:

*vilāsa rūpiṇe tubhyaṁ / namaḥ kṛṣṇāya te namaḥ
sakhīvarga sukhāptāya / krīḍā-vīmala darśine*

"I offer my obeisances to Śrī Kṛṣṇa in the form of He who plays lovely pastimes. He performs these pastimes simply to give pleasure to the *sakhīs*."

Ciksaulī

This village is situated below Brahmācal Parvata and between Saṅkarī Khor and Gahvaravana. It is the birth-place of Citrā Sakhī, one of the *aṣṭa-sakhīs*. Citrā Sakhī's parents were Catura Gopa and Carcitā Gopī. She was married to Pīṭhara Gopa in Jāvaṭa. She is very expert at decorating and dressing Śrīmatī Rādhikā in a variety of wonderful dresses and ornaments. She is also skilled in many arts, such as painting and understanding the language of animals and birds.

Once, Vṛṣabhānu Kumārī Rādhikā was playing here with Her girlfriends when She heard the very sweet and alluring sound of Śrī Kṛṣṇa's flute (*muralī*) in the distance. She became so enchanted by that sound that She offered Her

mind, body and everything to the person playing this sweet *muralī*, and became desirous to meet Him. Rādhikā then saw an amazingly beautiful painting of Śrī Kṛṣṇa that Citrā Sakhī had made. She forgot all else and offered Her everything to this astonishingly beautiful person. At this time, Śrī Kṛṣṇa and the *sakhās* were leaving to herd the cows. Upon seeing His supremely heart-stealing *tribhaṅga-lalita* form, Rādhā could not control Her feelings and offered Herself to this very beautiful young man. Śrī Kṛṣṇa went far into the distance to graze His cows.

Now in a state of great restlessness, Śrīmatījī began to relate what was on Her mind to Her *sakhīs*. She told Lalitā, “O *sakhī*! I don’t want to remain alive for a moment longer. Honourable women dedicate their hearts to one man only. When a young girl is engaged to someone, she considers him to be her husband and thinks of no one else. But today, I have become attached to three men – the flute player, the young man in Citrā’s painting, and the beautiful young man taking the cows out to graze. My *ārya-dharma* (righteous conduct) has been destroyed. What is the use of My remaining alive now?”

Hearing this, Śrī Lalitā burst into peels of laughter and said, “*Arī mugdhe!* (O bewildered one!) There is no need for You to die. These three are not different people; they are one and the same person. The man playing the sweet flute is none other than Nandanandana Śrī Kṛṣṇa. He is also the one in the painting and the one who went cowherding, so what need is there for You to give up Your life?”

Gahvaravana

Gahvara means ‘deep’, ‘dense’, ‘inaccessible’ and ‘secret’. True to its name, this place is a dense forest thick with trees, creepers, *keli-kuṣṇas*, and Priyā-Priyatama’s sweet and in-timate pastimes. It is shaped like a conch. Situated here is the *baithaka* of Vallabhācārya, where he recited *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, as well as Rādhā Sarovara and a *rāsa-maṇḍala*. One can also see the places of *bhajana* of many *bhaktas* here.⁶

One famous devotee, Nāgarī Dāsa, has described the *līlās* of this place in his songs. For instance, the following *līlā* took place here one day, when Śrī Kṛṣṇa was out grazing the cows with His *sakhās*:

*caksaulīke canā curāye
gārī de daurī rakhvārīn gvārīn sahīt gupāl bhagaye
hare būṭ dābe baglīn meirī svās bhare van gahvar āye
kahat āture bol lol dṛg haṁsat-haṁsat sab baran caḍhāye
hare cabāt, koū horā kari, van kī līlā lāl lubhāye
nāgariyā baithī chakī hārī chīl-chīl nandalālahirī khvāye*

“Nearby in a field, green chickpea plants were growing. Upon seeing them, Śrī Kṛṣṇa together with His *sakhās* broke off some plants. The woman taking care of the field came to know of this and ran to catch them, but Kanhaiyā was too swift. Keeping the plants under His arm, He ran very fast through

crooked paths and finally came to a stop in Gahvaravana, where He roasted the green chickpeas and ate them with His *sakhās*. While they were laughing and enjoying eating roasted chickpeas, the cowherd woman arrived at that spot, but upon seeing the splendour of Kṛṣṇa's beauty, she forgot the incident and her anger was pacified. Due to absorption in *vātsalya-bhāva*, she began shelling the peas and personally fed Kanhaiyā."

Kṛṣṇa Kuṇḍa

This *kuṇḍa* is also called Gahvara Kuṇḍa. Canopied by creepers on all sides and covered by thick trees, this pond is the very beauty of Gahvaravana. Nearby are beautiful *kuṣṇas*. Vaiṣṇavas perform *parikramā* of these *kuṣṇas* with deep faith and roll in the dust there. This *kuṇḍa* holds many memories of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa's various amorous exchanges (*līlā-vilāsa*).

Dohanī Kuṇḍa

This *kuṇḍa* is situated south of Gahvaravana and south-west of the village of Ciksaulī. The cows were milked here at the time of Kṛṣṇa's *prakaṭa-līlā*. This was the *gośālā* of the many *lākhs* of cows belonging to Vṛṣabhānu Mahārāja. One day, Kiśorī Rādhikā was watching the cows being milked, and She too desired to milk them. Taking a clay pot, She began to milk a cow. Mischievous Kṛṣṇa arrived at that spot and said, "*Sakhī!* Don't You even know how to milk a cow? Come, I'll teach You." He sat down next to Her. Rādhikā said, "O Mohana! Teach Me!" and She placed Herself in front of Him. "All right. You milk from two udders and I'll milk from the other two, and keep looking at Me." Laughingly, Kṛṣṇa started to milk. Suddenly, He aimed a jet of milk at Rādhā's face, covering Her in milk. He and the other *sakhīs* started laughing. This charming *līlā* has been described in the following Braja-bhāṣā poem:

*āmerṁ sāmerṁ baiṭh doū dohat karat ṭhaṭhor
dūdh dhār mukh par paḍat ḍṛg bhaye candr cakor*

Ḍabharāro

After taking *darśana* of Śrīmatī Rādhikā here, Kṛṣṇa's eyes brimmed with tears. The word *ḍabharāro* means 'full of tears', and this village therefore became known by that name. Ḍabharāro is situated two miles south of Varsānā.

Rasolī

One and a half miles south-west of Ḍabharāro is Rasolī, where Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa performed the famous *rāsa* along with the *gopīs*. This is the birthplace of Tungavidyā Sakhī. Tungavidyā's father is Puṣkara Gopa, her mother is Medhā Gopī, and her husband is Vāliśa. She is one of the *aṣṭa-sakhīs*, and is fully expert in dancing, singing, playing instrumental music, astrology, writing poetry, cooking, and various other arts. Tungavidyā Sakhī is also

skilled in understanding the language of birds and animals and in arranging for Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa's meeting.

Muktā Kuṇḍa

Here Śrīmatī Rādhikā, in a controversy with Kṛṣṇa, cultivated a field in which pearls grew in abundance. This pastime has been narrated in detail by Śrīpāda Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī in his book *Muktā-carita*.

Pīlī Pokhara

Surrounding this *kuṇḍa* are *pīlu* trees, which produce fruits in abundance. On the pretext of collecting *pīlu* fruits, Śrīmatī Rādhikā would come here to perform varieties of *krīḍā-vilāsa*. Śrī Kṛṣṇa would also come here from Nandagaon and enact many *līlās* with Śrīmatījī. Once, Kīrtikā-kumārī Śrīmatī Rādhikā and Her *sakhīs* went to Nandagaon to see Yaśodā Maiyā. Charmed by Śrīmatī Rādhikā's beauty and qualities, Yaśodā Maiyā desired in her heart to marry Rādhikā to her son Kṛṣṇa and thus have Her as her daughter-in-law. So great was her desire that she painted Kīśorī Rādhā's hands yellow. Kīśorī's heart became very happy but, as She returned to Her father's house in Varsānā, She became quite embarrassed. She washed and scrubbed Her hands in this pond, and the pond's water turned yellow. This pond is therefore called Pīlī Pokhara or Pīlī Pokhara, the yellow pond. It is also called Piyāla Kuṇḍa because *piyāla* trees surround it.

Kīrtidā Kuṇḍa

This *kuṇḍa* is situated near Vṛṣabhānu Kuṇḍa, in the north-east. Śrī Rādhikā's mother, Śrī Kīrtidā, used to take bath here daily. This *kuṇḍa* is also famous by the name Kīrti Sarovara.⁷

Vrajeśvara Mahādeva

Near Bhānu Sarovara is a *mūrti* of *devādhideva* Mahādeva, which was installed by Vṛṣabhānu Bābā and the other *gopas* to fulfil their desires. The Brajabāsīs worship him for their welfare. According to hearsay, some Brajabāsīs once desired to remove this *mūrti* from here and take him to a better place. As they dug, the form of Mahādeva increased in depth, and they were unable to reach the deity's base. In the end, they gave up the idea of removing this deity, understanding that this was the appropriate place for him, and begged Mahādeva for forgiveness.

Pastime-places Visited After Parikramā of Varsānā

Prema Sarovara

This *kuṇḍa* is situated on the road to Nandagaon, one mile from Varsānā. It is shaped like a boat and is so beautifully decorated on all sides with lush *kadamba* trees that it seems *prema* itself has manifested as a *kuṇḍa*. This charming place, which attracts the hearts of the devotees, is where Śrīmatī Rādhikā and Śrī Kṛṣṇa enjoy together. It is also where *prema vaicittya* manifested in Śrīmatī Rādhikā.

Once, Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, surrounded by Lalitā and the other *sakhīs*, were immersed in various kinds of loving pastimes (*premamaya līlā-vilāsa*) when a bumblebee hovered around the beautiful lotus face of Śrīmatī Rādhikā. Thinking Her face to be a lotus flower, the bee wanted to sit there and drink its nectar; it therefore continued to hover around Her face. Śrīmatījī became afraid and covered Her face with Her palms. She also tried to chase the bee away, but to no avail. Madhumaṅgala saw Śrīmatī Rādhikā's distress and chased the bumble bee far away with his stick. Upon his return, he announced, "I have chased *madhusūdana* far away from here. He has gone and will not return." When Śrīmatī Rādhikā heard Madhumaṅgala's words, She at once thought that Madhusūdana Kṛṣṇa had gone away and had left Her, although She was sitting directly in Kṛṣṇa's lap. She began to lament, deeply afflicted by separation from Him. She could not, at that instant, understand that *madhusūdana* also means 'bumblebee'. She wept and repeatedly cried out, "*Hā* Prāṇanātha! Where have You gone? *Hā* Prāṇanātha! Where have You gone?"

Upon seeing this amazing *bhāva*, called *prema vaicittya*, in His beloved Rādhikā, Kṛṣṇa also forgot that She was sitting on His lap. He too wept and cried, "*Hā* Priye!" The tears that flowed from Their eyes and the perspiration that poured from Their bodies created this pond, and Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa both fainted. When the *sakhīs* saw Them in this state, they too became senseless. Śrīmatī's *sārikā* then began to loudly chant Śrī Rādhā's name, and the *śuka* began to loudly chant Śrī Kṛṣṇa's name. As Their names entered Their ears, Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa regained external consciousness and gazed upon each other with great yearning. Gradually, the *sakhīs* also regained consciousness and in unlimited bliss began to call out, *Jaya! Jaya!* The poet Śrī Mādhurījī describes this *līlā* in a very charming way.

After this incident, Śrī Kṛṣṇa thought to Himself, "Although I remain close by My beloved Śrīmatī Rādhikā, I am unable to pacify the suffering She experiences in separation. The heat of impending separation constantly scorches Her, and I see no means to console Her. When I am far away from Her, She constantly thinks of Me out of separation. She becomes so absorbed in *bhāva* that She laughingly talks to *tamala* trees, thinking them to be Me, and plays with Her *sakhīs*. Sometimes She also displays *māna*. In contrast, when I am nearby, a feeling of separation from Me overcomes Her, and She becomes distressed and cries. In this condition, I am unable to console Her, even when I am right beside Her.

"Thus, Śrī Rādhā can be consoled only by My being far away from Her. In this state of separation, Her fire of separation can be somewhat pacified upon seeing My *sphūrti* or beholding objects like the *tamala* tree that possess a lustre similar to My own. This is because She actually considers them to be Her Priyatama." Thinking in this way, Kṛṣṇa secretly decided to leave for a distant place. This is the main reason why He left Vṛndāvana to go to Mathurā and Dvārakā.

The *bhāva* that Śrīmatī Rādhikā displays here is the topmost *mādana bhāva*, and is found only in Her. It does not manifest even in Lalitā and the other *sakhīs*. In this *mādana bhāva*, feelings of both *vipralambha* (separation) and *sambhoga* (meeting), as well as all other mutually opposed *bhāvas*, are present simultaneously in an astonishing way.

Prema Sarovara is a manifestation of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa's *bhāvas*, as the following Braja-bhāṣa poem explains:

*prem sarovar prem kī bharī rahe din rain
jañh jañh pyārī pag dharat śyām dharat tañh nain*

“Day and night, Prema Sarovara is always filled with *prema*. Pyārī, or Śrīmatī Rādhikā, keeps Her lotus feet there, and Śyāma desires to keep those lotus feet in the vision of His eyes. (In other words, Śyāma worships this *sarovara* because Śrīmatī has placed Her feet in its waters.)”

There is no doubt that by taking bath in this *sarovara*, one attains *prema* for Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa Yugala. Here one can take *darśana* of Lalitā-Mohanajī, a *rāsa-maṇḍala*, *jhūlā-sthala* (the place of a swing), Prema-Vihārījī Mandira, and the *baithakas* of Śrī Vallabhācārya and Śrī Viṭṭhalanātha. The village of Gājīpura lies east of this *kuṇḍa*. On the day of Bhādra Śuklā Dvādaśī (the fourth day from Rādhāṣṭamī), *bhūḍhī-līlā* is performed here.

Vihvala Kuṇḍa

This *kuṇḍa* lies near Saṅket, to the south-east. Here Śrī Kṛṣṇa became restless and overwhelmed (*vihvala*) upon hearing Śrī Rādhā's name.

One day, Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Subala Sakhā were engaged in *rasālāpa*, or sweet *rasika* talk, as they sat in a beautiful *kuṣja* by this delightful *kuṇḍa*. A *sārikā* sitting on the branch of a nearby tree began to sing the glories of Śrī Rādhikā's qualities. When Kṛṣṇa heard the name and qualities of Rādhikā, many kinds of sentiments arose in His heart and He saw manifestations of Rādhikā wherever He looked. He began to anxiously run here and there in an attempt to catch Her. Subala Sakhā saw the very elevated *aṣṭa-sāttvika bhāvas* of *mahābhāva* on Śrī Kṛṣṇa's limbs, and he started to contemplate how to pacify Kṛṣṇa's emotions. He thought that Kṛṣṇa would never be pacified without actually meeting with Śrīmatī Rādhikā, so he somehow sent news of Kṛṣṇa's astonishing state of restlessness to Viśākhā Sakhī and requested her to bring Śrīmatī Rādhikā to Kṛṣṇa. Śrīmatī Rādhikā arrived there with Viśākhā and some other *sakhīs*, and from a distance Subala pointed towards Śrī Kṛṣṇa, who was restless in separation. Being eager to meet, Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa became extremely happy to have *darśana* of each other. When Śrī Kṛṣṇa touched the body of Śrīmatī Rādhikā, He felt satisfied and content. That *sādhaka* who affectionately performs *bhajana* here will definitely become inundated by *prema* for Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa.

Saṅket

This place is situated between Nandagaon and Varsānā. The first meeting of Śrīmatī Rādhikā and Śrī Kṛṣṇa, after Their *pūrva-rāga*,⁸ took place here.

Śrīmatī Rādhikā would then come from the house of Her in-laws in Jāvaṭa and Śrī Kṛṣṇa would come from Nandagaon, and They would meet here. Vṛndā-devī, Vīrā-devī and Subala Sakhā would act as messengers (*dūtīs*) and arrange the meeting of Priyā and Priyatama by communicating through signals (*saṅkets*). This is why this place is called Saṅket. Sometimes, Śrīmatī Rādhikā would come here to meet with Kṛṣṇa (*abhisāra*), and sometimes Kṛṣṇa would come here to meet with Rādhikā.

In *Govinda-līlāmṛta* and *Kṛṣṇa-bhāvanāmṛta*, Śrīla Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja and Śrīla Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura describe Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa's *milana* and *vilāsa* here during *naiśa* (midnight) and *niśānta* (pre-dawn). These descriptions are full of *rasa*. By Yogamāyā's desire, the principal *dūtīs*, Śrī Vīrā-devī and Vṛndā-devī, arrange the meeting of Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa Yugala. Śrī Vṛndā-devī makes very sweet arrangements to awaken the Divine Couple at *niśānta*, the end of the night, just before dawn breaks. The *śuka* and *sārī* awaken Them with enchanting words. The *kokila* helps to wake Them up with her sweet *kuhu-kuhu*, and the peacock and peahen with their *ke-kā*. Lalitā, Viśākhā and the other *sakhīs* perform *āratī* to the Divine Couple. When Kakkhaṭī, the old she-monkey, calls out "Jaṭilā!," Śrī Rādhā and Śrī Kṛṣṇa become embarrassed and make Their separate ways to Their respective residences, where they fall asleep.

Delightful places worth visiting here are the *mandira* of Saṅket-Vihārījī, a *rāsa-maṇḍala*, and the place of a *jhūlā* (swing). The *bhajana-kuṭīra* of Śrī Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmī stands in front of the *rāsa-maṇḍala*, to its east. Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu rested here while travelling through the twelve forests of Braja. Just near the *rāsa-maṇḍala* is the temple of Saṅket-devī (Śrī Vīrā-devī); and nearby are Vihvalā-devī, Vihvala Kuṇḍa, Raṅgamahala and Śayyā Mandira. Kṛṣṇa Kuṇḍa lies to the west of the village. On the bank of Kṛṣṇa Kuṇḍa is a *baiṭhaka* of Śrī Vallabhācārya.

Some people continue their pilgrimage of Braja Maṇḍala by travelling from Saṅket to Nandagaon. Others visit and perform *parikramā* of the following pastime-places before continuing on to Nandagaon: Riṭhaura, Bhāṇḍokhora, Śrīmeherāna, Sātoyā, Pāī, Tiloyāra, Śṛṅgāra Vaṭa, Bichora, Andhopa, Sonda, Vanacārī, Hoḍal, Kuṣjaravana, Daīgaon, Lālpura, Hāroyāna, Sāṣculī, Geṇḍo and so forth.

Riṭhaura

This village is situated one and a half miles west of Saṅketvana, and is the village of Vṛṣabhānu Mahārāja's elder brother, Śrī Candrabhānu Gopa. Candrāvalī, the darling daughter of this same Candrabhānu, was born here. In the south-east of the village, surrounded by dense rows of trees, is Candrāvalī Kuṇḍa, where Candrāvalī used to perform her childhood pastimes (*balya-kṛīḍā*) with her *sakhīs*, take bath, and play in the water (*jal-kṛīḍā*). Another *baiṭhaka* of Vallabhācārya is here.

Bhāṇḍokhora

This place, situated four miles north-west of Riṭhaura and four miles west of Nandagaon, is where Mahārāja Nanda had his western *gośālā*. Earthen vessels (*bhāṇḍa*) were filled with milk or washed here, which is why this place is known as Bhāṇḍokhora.

Meherāna Gaon

This village lies two miles west of Bhāṇḍokhora. Śrī Kṛṣṇa's uncle Abhinandana Gopa lived here, and his *gośālā* was nearby. Abhinandana Gopa is the second eldest among Brajarāja Nanda and his four brothers. Some people also consider this place to be the home of Yaśodā's father. In the eastern part of this village is Kṣīrasāgara. It is said that at midnight on Śiva-rātri, a stream of milk emanates from the middle of this *kuṇḍa*, which is why this *kuṇḍa* is named Kṣīrasāgara, or 'Ocean of Milk'.

Once, Yaśodā Maiyā and child Kṛṣṇa came to the house of Abhinandana, Yaśodā Maiyā's older brother-in-law. After dinner, Yaśodā Maiyā sat on the bed lulling Kṛṣṇa to sleep in her lap. Kṛṣṇa said, "Maiyā, please tell a story." Yaśodā proceeded to narrate a story as Kṛṣṇa nodded 'Yes, yes.' Yaśodā said, "There was a king named Daśaratha. He had four sons - Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa, Bharata and Śatrughna. Rāma was married to Jānakī, the daughter of Mahārāja Janaka, who was also known as Sītā. On the order of His father, Rāma went to the forest with His wife Sītā and younger brother Lakṣmaṇa." Kṛṣṇa uttered "Yes, yes" and Yaśodā Maiyā continued. "In the forest, a demon named Rāvaṇa kidnapped Sītā." Hearing this, Kṛṣṇa, being absorbed in His previous incarnation as Rāma, called out, "Lakṣmaṇa! Bring My bow! Lakṣmaṇa! Bring My bow!" and jumped up from bed. Seeing this made Yaśodā Maiyā fearful. This *līlā* took place here.

Sātoyā

This village lies two miles west of Meherāna Gaon. It is also called Satvāsa. At this place, Mahārāja Satrājita, the father of one of Śrī Kṛṣṇa's queens named Satyabhāmā, worshiped the Sungod. Over the years, the word *satrā* has evolved into the name Satvāsa.

North-east of this village is Sūrya Kuṇḍa, on the northern bank of which is Sūrya Mandira. Mahārāja Satrājita used to worship Sūryadeva here after taking bath in the *kuṇḍa*. Sūryadeva became pleased and awarded him a *sūryakānta maṇi*, a jewel which daily yielded him an abundance of gold.

Pāīgaon

This village is situated five and half miles north-west of Satvāsa. Once, Śrī Kṛṣṇa was playing hide and seek with the *sakhīs*. Kṛṣṇa hid somewhere, and Rādhikā and the *sakhīs* anxiously searched for Him. After great endeavour, the *gopīs* found Kṛṣṇa here. Rādhikā and the *sakhīs* became overjoyed to have spotted Kṛṣṇa, and they cried out, *Pāī-pāī!* ("I have found! I have found!"). This village thus became renowned as Pāī. All the villages mentioned above lie on the border of Braja.

Tiloyāra

Here, Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa and the *sakhīs* became so absorbed in *līlā-vilāsa* that they entirely forgot to eat, what to speak of to return home. Somehow, Vṛndā-devī finally reminded them to return home. This place became known as Tiloyāra because Kṛṣṇa and the *gopīs* were not even slightly conscious of the passage of time here. *Tila mātra* means ‘very slightly’; it is used in Hindi to denote a very slight amount of time or space. Tiloyāra is also situated on the border of Braja Maṇḍala. Muslims of the Meva caste reside in the villages around here.

Śṛṅgāra Vaṭa

This place is situated two miles north of Tiloyāra. While playing here, the *sakhās* decorated Śrī Kṛṣṇa’s body with sixteen kinds of ornaments (*śṛṅgāra*). Sometimes, Śrī Kṛṣṇa combed and decorated Śrīmatī Rādhikā’s hair with sixteen kinds of ornaments. The *vaṭa* tree that was once here has now disappeared, but the village is still known by the name of Śṛṅgāra Vaṭa or Śṛṅgāra Gaon.

Bichora

This pastime-place is situated one and half miles north-east of Śṛṅgāra Vaṭa and ten miles south-west of Kosī. Śrī Kṛṣṇa performed various kinds of *līlā-vilāsa* here with Śrīmatī Rādhikā and the *sakhīs*. After enjoying together, as They were about to return home, They both became greatly distressed by Their impending separation. This village has therefore become known as Bichora. The word *bichora* derives from *viccheda*, meaning ‘separation’. This is the purport of the following verse from *Śrī Bhakti-ratnākara*:

*krīḍāvasānete doṇhe cale nijālaya
viccheda-prayukta e ‘bichora’ nāma haya*

Andhopa

This village lies two miles north-west of Bichora and three miles north of Śṛṅgāra Vaṭa. It too is situated on the border of Braja.

Sonda

The village of Sonda lies four miles north-east of Andhopa. It is the village where Nanda Mahārāja’s younger brother Sananda used to live. He loved Kṛṣṇa very much. Sometimes he would call Kṛṣṇa, bathe and dress Him, seat Him next to himself, and feed Him delicious preparations.

Vanacarī

This village is situated two miles north of Sonda and east of the Mathurā-Delhi highway. It too lies on the border of Braja. One can have *darśana* of Dāūjī here.

Hoḍal

Hoḍal lies four miles south-east of Vanacarī on the Delhi-Mathurā highway. Near this village is Pāṇḍavavana, where the Pāṇḍavas resided during their exile. Pāṇḍava Kuṇḍa is also nearby, which is where the Pāṇḍavas used to bathe and drink water.

Kuṣjaravana

South-west of Hoḍal, about one mile away, is Kuṣjaravana, where Kṛṣṇa used to play with the *sakhīs* in the *kuṣjas*. Sometimes, many *sakhīs* would together make themselves into an elephant (*kuṣjara*) here, upon which Śrī Kṛṣṇa would ride. Because this incident took place here, this place became known as Kuṣjaravana.

Daīgaon

This place lies three miles south of Hoḍal, and is where Kṛṣṇa and His *sakhās* looted yoghurt from the *gopīs* on the excuse of collecting tax. Here, one can have *darśana* of Dadhi Kuṇḍa, Madhusūdāna Kuṇḍa, Śṛṅgāra Mandira, Śītala Kuṇḍa and Sapta Vṛkṣa Maṇḍalī. On the bank of Śītala Kuṇḍa under a *kadamba* tree is a *baiṭhaka* of Śrī Vallabhācārya.

Lālpura

This village is situated one and a half miles west of Daīgaon. North of this village is the *āśrama* of Durvāṣā Muni. Durvāṣā Kuṇḍa and the *mandira* of Durvāṣā are here.

Hāroyāna Grāma

This village is currently called Pīparavāra. Here, Śrīmatī Rādhikā defeated Kṛṣṇa in a game of dice and won His *varṁśī*.

Once, Śrīmatī Rādhikā consulted Lalitā and the other *sakhīs*, saying, “Since Kṛṣṇa is physically more powerful than us, He defeats us in the games which depend upon bodily strength. Please think of a game based upon intelligence by which we can easily defeat Him.” Lalitā Sakhī advised Śrīmatījī to challenge Kṛṣṇa to a game of dice. Following this meeting, the *sakhīs* challenged Kṛṣṇa to play dice with them. As soon as the game had started, Śrīmatī Rādhikā very easily defeated Kṛṣṇa and snatched away His *varṁśī*, which had been kept on stake. Madhumāṅgala, who was sitting nearby, pretended to be sad and said, “Kanhaiyā! The *gopīs* have just taken Your *varṁśī*, and they will now confiscate everything of Yours. You are expert at grazing the cows, so go and do that. I feel very unhappy when I see You defeated like this.” Saying this, He started laughing. Kṛṣṇa rebuked him, calling him a talkative *brāhmaṇa*, and told him to keep quiet.

This village has been named Hāroyāna on account of this *līlā*, in which Kṛṣṇa was defeated at dice. *Hārṇā* means ‘to be defeated’.

Sāṣculī

This place is situated four miles south of Hāroyāna Grāma and six miles north-west of Nandagaon. In this village, one can have *darśana* of the

mandira of Candrāvalī Sakhī and of Sūrya Kuṇḍa. Candrāvalī used to meet Kṛṣṇa here on the pretext of performing Sūrya-pūjā.

Geṇḍo

This village lies three miles east of Sāṣculī Grāma. Kṛṣṇa and Baladeva used to play ball games here with the *sakhās*. *Geṇḍa* means ‘ball’. This village has seven *kuṇḍas*. Geṇḍa Kuṇḍa, which is where Śrī Balarāma used to stand when they played ball games, is in the north of the village; and Geṇḍa Khora, which is where Kṛṣṇa used to stand, is in the north-west. Gaidharāvana is in the east, Belvana Kuṇḍa is in the south, Gopī Kuṇḍa is in the south-west, Jalbhara Kuṇḍa is in the west, and Vihāra Kuṇḍa is in the north-west. The *gopīs* filled their pots with water (*jal bharnā*) from Jalbhara Kuṇḍa.

Chapter 10

Nandagaon

The royal palace of Brajarāja Nanda Mahārāja is situated in Nandagaon. This village is a source of happiness because Śrī Nanda Rāya, Upānanda, Abhinanda, Sunanda and Nanda all lived here.¹ Nandagaon is situated sixteen miles north-west of Govardhana, eight miles south of Kosī and twenty-eight miles west of Vṛndāvana. The *parikramā* of Nandagaon is four miles. There are fifty-six *kuṇḍas* related to Śrī Kṛṣṇa’s various *līlās* and it takes about three to four days to have *darśana* of them all.

Devādhideva Mahādeva Śaṅkara pleased his worshipable deity Śrī Kṛṣṇa and asked for the boon to have *darśana* of Śrī Kṛṣṇa’s childhood pastimes (*bālyalīlā*). Svayaṁ Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa ordered him to situate himself in Nandagaon in the form of a hill. Śrī Śaṅkara Mahādeva followed this order and became Nandīśvara Hill. He then waited for the arrival of his worshipable deity. To fulfil the desire of the exalted Vaiṣṇava Śaṅkara, Śrī Kṛṣṇa performed His sweet *bālyā* (childhood) and *paugaṇḍa* (boyhood) pastimes on Nandīśvara Hill, along with the Brajabāsīs like Nanda Bābā, Yaśodā Maiyā and His *gopa* friends.

At the end of Dvāpara-yuga, there lived a *muni* named Devamīḍha. He had two wives, one from a *kṣatriya* family and the other from a *gopa* family. Śūrasena was born from the *kṣatriya* wife, and Parjanya Gopa from his *gopa* wife. Vasudeva and other *kṣatriya* sons were born from Śūrasena. Parjanya Gopa maintained his life by agriculture and rearing cows. He lived near Nandīśvara Hill with his wife Varīyasī Gopī.

Once, Devarṣi Nārada came there, and Parjanya Gopa pleased him by offering him appropriate worship. He then requested Nārada to bless him with excellent progeny. Nāradaḥ initiated him into the Lakṣmī-Nārāyaṇa *mantra* and informed him, “You will have illustrious progeny by meditating upon this *mantra*.” When Nāradaḥ left, Parjanya Gopa set about repeating this *mantra* in his mind. Daily, he would meditate upon it following the proper process, after first taking his bath in the nearby Taḍāga Tīrtha. One day while he was absorbed in the *mantra*, a divine voice from the sky announced, “O Parjanya! You are very fortunate to have performed one-

pointed worship of Me. You will have five highly qualified sons. Of these, the middle son, Nanda, will be greatly fortunate. All victorious Śrī Hari Himself, who is fully endowed with six kinds of opulences and who gives pleasure to all living beings, will appear as his son.” Upon hearing this divine announcement, Parjanya Gopa became overjoyed.

In due course of time, five sons and two daughters were born. Parjanya Gopa and his family stayed near Nandīśvara Hill for some time longer, but, fearing the disturbances created by the Keśī demon, they left for Gokula-Mahāvana. There, Svayaṁ Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇacandra appeared as the son of the middle brother, Nanda Mahārāja. After some time, however, on account of the disturbances of Pūtanā, Śakaṭāsura, Tṛṇāvarta and other demons, Brajeśvara Śrī Nanda Mahārāja, together with his sons, family members, relatives, cows, *gopas* and *gopīs*, moved to Chaṭṭikarā village. After that they moved to Kāmyavana, Khelanvana and other places before finally returning to live at Nandīśvara (Nanda-gaon). Many *bālya* and *paugaṇḍa* pastimes of Kṛṣṇa took place here. It was from here that on Gopāṣṭamī day, Kṛṣṇa and Baladeva along with the *sakhās* first went out to graze the calves, and after some years the cows.

Pastime-places Within the Compound of Nanda Bhavan

The compound of Nanda Bhavan is immense and holds many delightful pastime-places. Śrī Raghupati Upādhyāya glorifies Nanda Bābā and this compound in very sweet words:

*śrutim apare smṛtim itare
bhāratam anye bhajantu bhava-bhītāḥ
aham iha nandaṁ vande
yasyālinde param brahma*

(Padyāvalī 126)

“Those who are afraid of the perplexities of worldly life worship the *śrutis* and *smṛtis*, or maybe the *Mahābhārata*. Let them do so. I myself will always worship Nanda Bābā, in whose courtyard Parama Brahma is crawling here and there on His knees.”

Nanda Bhavan (Nanda’s residence)

To the south, adjacent to Nandīśvara Hill, are a few ruins of the staircase of Nanda Bhavan. Nanda’s residence here was extensive, with separate bedrooms for everyone including Nanda Bābā, mother Yaśodā, mother Rohiṇī, Kṛṣṇa and Baladeva. It had a kitchen, store-room and dining hall, as well as resting-rooms and other rooms for Rādhikā and Kṛṣṇa. Here, Kṛṣṇa and Baladeva performed many of Their *bālya*, *paugaṇḍa* and *kiśora* (youth) *līlās*. Daily, at forenoon (*pūrvāhna*), Śrīmatī Rādhikā used to come here from Jāvaṭa with Her *sakhīs* on the zealous and loving requests of mother Yaśodā, and with great delight, She would prepare many tasty foodstuffs for Kṛṣṇa together with mother Rohiṇī. Kṛṣṇa used to eat lunch with His *sakhās* in the

adjacent large dining-hall and then rest in the bedroom situated one hundred steps from the dining-hall.

Rādhikā's Viśrāma Sthala

This is Śrīmatī Rādhikā's resting place. After completing Her cooking, Śrīmatī Rādhikā would, on the request of mother Yaśodā, take *prasāda* mixed with the remnants of Kṛṣṇa that Dhaniṣṭhā Sakhī would bring. Mother Yaśodā then invited Her to take rest in this garden. At that time, the *sakhīs* used to arrange for Her secret meeting with Kṛṣṇa. This place is called Rādhā Bāga, Rādhā's garden.

Vana-gamana Sthāna

(the path for going to the forest)

Every day, mother Yaśodā used to decorate Rāma and Kṛṣṇa in different ways, thus preparing Them to go to the forest to graze the cows. She would then send Them and the *sakhās* off from here with a heavy heart.

Gocarāṇa-gamana Mārga

(the path for going cow-grazing)

Rāma and Kṛṣṇa, the best of dancers, used this path along with Their friends when they went cow-grazing.

Rādhikā Bidā Sthala

Here, mother Yaśodā used to put Śrīmatī Rādhikā on her lap before seeing Her off to Jāvaṭa with tearful eyes. *Bidā karnā* means 'to see someone off'.

Dadhi-manthana Sthala

Every day in the early morning, mother Yaśodā used to churn yoghurt at this place. To this day, one can see an enormous yoghurt pot here. *Dadhi-manthana* means 'the churning of *dadhi* (yoghurt)'.

Pūrṇamāsijī kâ Āgamana Patha

(Pūrṇamāsī's arrival path)

Yogamāyā Pūrṇamāsī used to arrive at Nanda Bhavan along this path to have *darśana* of baby Kṛṣṇa.

Other Pastime-places in Nandagaon

Nanda Kuṇḍa

Nanda Kuṇḍa lies a short distance to the south of Nanda Bhavan. Daily, early in the morning, Mahārāja Nanda used to bathe here and chant his *sandhyā mantra* and so forth. Sometimes, he would bring Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma here on his shoulders and bathe Them too. In the temple on the bank of this *kuṇḍa* are very attractive deities of Nanda Bābā with baby Kṛṣṇa and Dāūjī sitting in his lap.

Nanda Baiṭhaka

Brajeśvara Mahārāja Nanda would occasionally sit here with his elder and younger brothers, as well as with the elderly *gopas*, priests and so on, to discuss Kṛṣṇa's well-being. It is called a *baiṭhaka* because they would sit here together for discussions. *Baiṭhnā* means 'to sit'. Nanda Mahārāja has several *baiṭhakas* in the eighty-four *kosas* of Braja Maṇḍala. Wherever Nanda Bābā used to reside with his cows, *gopas*, *gopīs* and others is called Nanda-Gokula. There used to be periodic meetings like this wherever he resided. Thus, other such *baiṭhakas* include Choṭī Baiṭhana and Baḍī Baiṭhana. The following pastime refers to this kind of *baiṭhaka*, or assembly.

Seven-year-old Kṛṣṇa held Girirāja Govardhana for seven days on His little finger and smashed the pride of Indra. All the elderly *gopas* became very astonished by this incident and they called a *baiṭhaka*. Upānanda, the eldest brother of Nanda Mahārāja, was the chairman of this meeting to which Nanda Bābā had also been called. The elderly *gopas* expressed their opinion that Śrī Kṛṣṇa was not an ordinary boy. "Soon after taking birth, He killed the terrible *rākṣasī* Pūtanā, as if He were simply playing," they said. "Afterwards, He killed Śakaṭāsura, Tṛṇāvarta, Aghāsura and many other demons. He subdued the terrible snake Kālīya and sent him out of Kālī Daha. Just a few days ago, He held the huge mountain Girirāja on His little finger for seven days and saved Braja from the heavy downpour of rain and raging storms. These are not the activities of an ordinary boy. It seems to us that He must be either a *siddha puruṣa*, a demigod or Nārāyaṇa Himself. It is not proper for us to consider Him to be the son of Nanda and Yaśodā, to chastise or threaten Him, or to address Him as 'thief', 'willful', 'impertinent' and so on. Therefore, Nanda, Yaśodā and the other *gopas* and *gopīs* should always deal with Him lovingly and respectfully." All the *gopas* present there took this statement very seriously and together they cautioned Nanda Bābā on this matter.

Nanda Bābā laughingly dismissed their words. He said, "Respected gentlemen! I have heard your statements, but I do not see even the slightest demigod-like symptom or symptom of *bhagavattā* (supreme godliness) in Him. I have known Him from His very birth. Does Bhagavān feel hunger or thirst? This boy cries fifty times a day for *makkhana* and *roṭī* (bread and butter). Does Bhagavān steal and tell lies? This boy goes to the homes of the *gopīs* and steals their butter, speaks lies, and makes so much mischief. The neighbouring *gopīs* play games with Him and make Him dance for a hand-full of buttermilk and a *laḍḍū*. Whoever He is, He has taken birth in our home as our son; therefore, it is our duty to raise Him to become an ideal man of excellent conduct who possesses all good qualities. That said, there is one thing we should remember. At the time of Kṛṣṇa's name-giving ceremony, Maharṣi Gargācārya pre-dicted that this child of ours would have qualities like those of Bhagavān Nārāyaṇa. This fact explains everything."

Baiṭhakas were held to discuss Kṛṣṇa's well-being, His betrothal and other such matters.

Yaśodā Kuṇḍa

This *kuṇḍa* is situated south of Nanda Bhavan. Mother Yaśodā used to take her daily bath here. Sometimes, she would bring Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma along and very happily watch Their childhood games (*bāl-kṛīḍā*). After bathing, mother Yaśodā would pray to Nṛsiṁhadeva, who is situated in a temple on the bank of this *kuṇḍa*, for Kṛṣṇa's well-being. An ancient cave, where many great saints have performed *sādhana* and attained Bhagavān, lies at a secluded place near Yaśodā Kuṇḍa. To this day, this place, where *siddha mahātmās* have performed their *bhajana*, attracts *nirapekṣa sādhakas* who come here to perform *bhajana*. Kāroharo Kuṇḍa lies near Yaśodā Kuṇḍa.

Hāū Bilāū

On the western bank of Yaśodā Kuṇḍa is a place of Kṛṣṇa's childhood pastimes with His friends. Here, the brothers Kṛṣṇa and Baladeva would become so absorbed in Their childhood games that They even forgot to come home to eat and drink. Maiyā Yaśodā would first send Rohiṇījī to get Them, but as Rohiṇījī approached, Kṛṣṇa and Baladeva ran away, frustrating her attempts to catch Them. Yaśodājī would then go herself. She would employ various tricks and, with great difficulty, bring Them home where she bathed and fed Them. Sometimes she told Them about a *hāūa*, or hobgoblin, and filled Them with fear. She would then catch Kṛṣṇa in her arms and bring Him home. Once, Kṛṣṇa insisted on seeing the *hāūa*, "Maiyā, I want to see the *hāūa*." The following Braja-bhāṣā poem tells this delightful *līlā*:

*dūr khelan mat jāu lāl yahān hāū āye haiṇ
haṁskar pūcht kānh maiyā yah kinai paṭhāye haiṇ*

“Do not go far away, my child, the *hāūa* has come.’ Kṛṣṇa would smile and ask Maiyā who had sent him.”

Even today, the stone figures of the *hāūa* here are a reminder of this sweet childhood pastime.

Madhusūdana Kuṇḍa

This *kuṇḍa* is situated south of Nandīśvara, near Yaśodā Kuṇḍa, and lies within a grove of trees and creepers that are laden with many kinds of flowers. Here, intoxicated bumble bees always buzz around, drinking nectar from the flowers. Kṛṣṇa plays with the *sakhās* in this forest and imitates the buzzing of the bees. One of the names for bumble bee is *madhusūdana*, and one of Kṛṣṇa's names is also Madhusūdana. This is where the two Madhusūdanas buzz, and this pond is therefore known as Madhusūdana Kuṇḍa.

Pānīhārī Kuṇḍa

The Brajabāsīs used to drink the pure and sweet water of this *kuṇḍa*, and the *gopa-ramaṇīs* would come here to fetch water. Therefore, this *kuṇḍa* is also known as Panaghaṭa Kuṇḍa. A *panaghaṭa* is a place from which water is

taken, like a well, river or pond. Kṛṣṇa would come to Panaghaṭa to meet with the *gopīs*, and they too would very eagerly make their way here to meet Kṛṣṇa. While drawing water, they would become so absorbed in looking at Kṛṣṇa that they were unaware whether or not they had filled their pots. The pot of their hearts, however, would at once become filled with their beloved. There is also another deep secret behind Panaghaṭa. The *gopīs* would come here remembering Kṛṣṇa's *pana*, or promise: "I will certainly meet you there." To fulfil His promise, Kṛṣṇa ensured that He was present here, waiting for them. Thus the *pana* (keeping of one's promise or drawing of water) of both Kṛṣṇa and the *gopīs* would take place (*ghaṭita*) here. This is the other reason why this place is known as Panaghaṭa.

Caraṇa Pahāḍī

This place is situated west of Nandagaon. During cow-herding, Kṛṣṇa played His flute on this hill (*pahāḍī*) to assemble His *lākhs* and *lākhs* of cows. By the tender and sweet sound of His flute, this hill melted and became marked with the impressions of Kṛṣṇa's foot-prints (*caraṇa cihna*). Hence, this hill is called Caraṇa Pahāḍī.

On Kāṁsa's order, the great devotee Akrūra came to Nandagaon to bring Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma to Mathurā. When he saw Kṛṣṇa's footprints on this hill and everywhere in the sand nearby, he became filled with *bhāva* and began crying and rolling around on them. To this day, devotees become ecstatic upon seeing Kṛṣṇa's footprints here.

Gāyoṇ kā Khūñṭā (posts for binding the cows)

Near Caraṇa Pahāḍī are Rohiṇī Kuṇḍa, Mohiṇī Kuṇḍa and a number of posts in a field for binding cows. This is the site of Nanda Bābā's *gośālā*, and his cows were tied to these posts. Today, Brajabāsī ladies worship these posts on special occasions.

Vṛndā-devī

Some distance north of Caraṇa Pahāḍī is the *kuṣja* of Vṛndājī. Vṛndā-devī resided here at the time of Śrī Kṛṣṇa's *prakaṭa-līlā*, manifest pastimes. From here, she would arrange the meeting of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa in the *kuṣjas* of Saṅket and other places. Sometimes, she would consult Yogamāyā Pūrṇimādevī and by her order arrange the meeting of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa Yugala through various tricks and clever means. Here lies the *kuṇḍa* of Vṛndā-devī, in which she used to take bath and so forth. Vṛndā-devī wears beautiful clothes, and is decorated with many kinds of ornaments. She is the *adhiṣṭhātrī vanadevī* of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa's *kuṣja-līlā*. It is impossible for anyone to enter Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa's pastimes without Vṛndā-devī's mercy. Tulasījī is the worshipable form (*arcāvatāra*) of the original Vṛndā-devī. Kṛṣṇa does not accept any offering without *tulasī* leaves or *maṣjarīs*.

Near Vṛnda Kuṇḍa, in the east, is Cauḍokhara, which is also called Caraṇa Kuṇḍa. Near this *kuṇḍa* are Rohiṇī Kuṇḍa, Mohinī Kuṇḍa, Gāyoṇ kâ Khūṇṭā, Nanda Bābā's *gośālā* and Dohinī Kuṇḍa.

Pāvana Sarovara

This *sarovara* lies north of Nandagaon when coming down from Nandīśvara Hill, and is situated on the side of the highway leading towards Kāmyavana. The custom is to bathe in this *sarovara* before taking *darśana* of Nanda, Yaśodā and the others on the crest of the hill. It is said that Pāvana Gopa, the father of Viśākhā Sakhī, constructed this *sarovara*, thereby giving it its name. When Kṛṣṇa and His friends would return from cow-grazing, they would bring the cows here to drink. At that time, Kṛṣṇa would call out “*Nīrī-nīrī*” and signal to the cows to enter the *sarovara*. He would then call out “*Cūṇ-cūṇ*” to induce the cows to drink water, and “*Tīrī-tīrī*” to call them back to the bank. The boys would satisfy the cows by having them drink water in this way before returning them to their resting place in the *gośālā*. The boys would then go back to their respective homes.

The Brajabāsīs would also bathe in the fragrant and pure water of Pāvana Sarovara. Kṛṣṇa used to bathe here and frolic in the water (*jala-kṛīḍā*) with His friends. On the far bank, Śrīmatī Rādhikā used to bathe and play in the water with Her *sakhīs*. Sometimes Kṛṣṇa would dive in from His bank like a crocodile, make His way unseen to the bank of the *sakhīs*, and catch their feet. In this way, He played with them (*kṛīḍā-vilāsa*). Mahārāja Vṛṣabhānu had a beautiful palace built for his daughter Śrīmatī Rādhikā on the northern bank of Pāvana Sarovara. She played many games with Her *sakhīs* in this palace, from which She could very easily have *darśana* of Her beloved Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī's bhajana-kuṭī

On the south-eastern bank of Pāvana Sarovara is the *bhajana-kuṭī* of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu's *parikara* Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī. Sometimes, Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī would perform *bhajana* here so as to remember the sweet pastimes of Nanda-gaon, and sometimes he would go to associate with Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmījī at his *bhajana-kuṭī* near Kadamba Ṭer. Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī also used to come here to see Sanātana Gosvāmī. Even today, many Gauḍīya *bhaktas* in Śrī Sanātana Gosvāmī's *paramparā* come to this *bhajana-kuṭī* to perform *bhajana*.

Once, in the forest here, Sanātana Gosvāmī was very distressed in separation from Kṛṣṇa. Restlessly crying for Kṛṣṇa's *darśana*, he went without eating and drinking for three days. At that time, he had no *bhajana-kuṭī* here. Kṛṣṇa came to Sanātana Gosvāmī as a cowherd boy carrying some milk in a clay pot, and said, “Why are you here hungry and thirsty? Nobody remains hungry and thirsty here. My mother saw you in this condition and has sent this pot of milk for you. You must drink it. I will return later and collect the pot. Just see! My mother has also said that since it distresses the

Brajabāsīs to see you here in the forest like this, you should make a hut here and live in it.” Saying this, the boy left. When Sanātana Gosvāmī drank the milk, he became very restless due to *kṛṣṇa-prema* and cried bitterly, calling out, “*Hā Kṛṣṇa! Hā Kṛṣṇa!* You gave me *darśana* but have cheated me.” Although remaining invisible to Sanātana Gosvāmī, Kṛṣṇa pacified him and had a *bhajana-kuṭī* built for him through a Brajabāsī. Sanātana Gosvāmī remained in this *bhajana-kuṭī*, where he began performing *bhajana*. Nearby is the temple of Pāvana-Bihārī. The Brajabāsīs in the village bathe in this *sarovara* in the morning and then take *darśana* of Pāvana-Bihārī.

Nearby on the northern bank is the *baiṭhaka* of Śrī Vallabhācāryajī where he recited *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* for one month. In the west of Pāvana Sarovara is a *kadamba-khaṇḍī*, where the beauty of the *kadamba* trees is extraordinary. The bumble bees drink the nectar of the *kadamba* flowers and buzz about intoxicated. This *kadamba-khaṇḍī* is especially dear to Śrī Baladevajī, who used to enjoy many games here with His younger brother Kṛṣṇa and with the *sakhās*. This unique *kadamba-khaṇḍī* reminds one of Kṛṣṇa and Dāūjī’s innumerable pastimes. Even today, many *sādhus* perform *bhajana* here.

Taḍāga Tīrtha (Khunnāhāra Kuṇḍa)

This is Śrī Parjanya Gopa’s place of worship, and is situated near Pāvana Sarovara towards the north-east. Previously, Parjanya Gopa had no sons, so he took initiation from Devarṣi Nārada in the Lakṣmī-Nārāyaṇa *mantra*. Giving up eating and drinking, he performed severe austerities at this place. Morning, noon and evening he bathed in this *sarovara*, worshipped the deity and chanted the *mantra* he had received from his *guru*. After some time, he heard a divine voice from the sky, “O Parjanya! You will have five sons who will be endowed with all good qualities. Bhagavān Śrī Hari Himself will take birth as the son of Nanda, your middle son. He will destroy the demons and perform many kinds of pastimes.” This *kuṇḍa* is also called Khunnāhāra Kuṇḍa because Parjanya performed austerities here. *Khunnāhāra* means ‘to give up grains and water’.

Dhovanī Kuṇḍa

This *kuṇḍa* is situated north-west of Nandagaon, below Nandīśvara Hill, and somewhat near to Pāvana Sarovara. It received the name Dhovanī Kuṇḍa because the pots of milk and yoghurt were washed (*dhonā*) here.

Motī Kuṇḍa (Muktā Kuṇḍa)

This charming *kuṇḍa*, situated about one mile north of Nandīśvara Taḍāga, is surrounded by *karīla* and *pīlū* trees. While cow-herding with His friends, Kṛṣṇa used to bring the cows here to drink. He and the *sakhās* also drank water here and performed many pastimes together. Once, Kṛṣṇa planted pearls (*motī* or *muktā*) here and produced an abundant crop.

When Kṛṣṇa crossed from *paugaṇḍa* and entered *kiśora*, Yaśodā Maiyā began to worry about His betrothal. She very much liked the daughter of Vṛṣabhānu

Mahārāja, Kīśorī Rādhikā, who was endowed with all good qualities. Kīrtikājī came to know of this fact and discussed it with her husband, Vṛṣabhānujī. They then sent many varieties of clothes and ornaments together with a basketful of pearls to Nanda Bhavan for the engagement. Brajarāja Nanda and Brajarānī Yaśodā became very pleased to see this, but it also caused them anxiety. Custom demanded that they send an even greater quantity of pearls to Varsānā in exchange for the engagement gifts, however, they simply did not have that many pearls. Just then, Kṛṣṇa entered the house and, upon seeing His parents in anxiety, He asked them what was the cause of their concern. When Yaśodā Maiyā explained the situation, Kṛṣṇa simply said, “Don’t worry. I will quickly arrange something.”

When the right opportunity came, Kṛṣṇa stole all of His parents’ pearls, dug a field near this *kuṇḍa*, and planted them there. Every day, He irrigated the field with cow’s milk. When Nanda Bābā and Yaśodā Maiyā could not find the few pearls they had, they became even more concerned and asked Kṛṣṇa if He knew where they might be. “Yes!” Kṛṣṇa said, “I have planted those pearls, and very soon we will get plenty of pearls from them.” Hearing this, Bābā and Maiyā exclaimed, “*Are lālā!* Has anyone ever farmed pearls?” Kṛṣṇa smiled and said, “Yes. When My pearls will sprout and fructify, then you will see for yourselves.”

Surprisingly, the pearls began to sprout after a few days, and lush, green plants emerged. A few days later, those plants bore fruit; and as these fruits ripened, radiant and splendid divine pearls began to manifest. Now there was a great abundance of pearls. Kṛṣṇa gave a large amount to His mother, who was able to fill three or four very beautiful baskets with pearls, golden ornaments and clothes, and send them to Varsānā to confirm the betrothal of Rādhājī to Kṛṣṇa.

When Śrīmatī Rādhikā and Her *sakhīs* heard that Śrī Kṛṣṇa had planted pearls and reaped a huge crop, they asked Him for some. However, Kṛṣṇa flatly refused. “When I requested some milk from you to irrigate My pearls, you refused to give Me any. Now I will decorate My cows with ornaments made from these pearls, but I will not give any to you.” Vexed, the *gopīs* stole pearls from their own homes, dug a field and planted them. Although they irrigated the field with cow-milk for many days, the pearls did not sprout pearl plants – only thorny plants completely devoid of fruit emerged from the soil. The disappointed *gopīs* returned to Kṛṣṇa and narrated the whole story to Him. Kṛṣṇa smiled and said, “Come! I want to see your pearl field Myself.” Kṛṣṇa went there and uprooted all the thorny plants. He planted His own ripened pearls and irrigated the field with cow-milk. Within a few days, these pearls sprouted and also bore pearls, filling the *gopīs* hearts with joy.

Phulvārī Kuṇḍa

This *kuṇḍa* is situated near Mukṭā Kuṇḍa in the middle of a dense grove of *kadamba* trees. One day, Śrī Rādhājī and Her *sakhīs* were picking flowers

here when Kṛṣṇa suddenly arrived and said, “Who are you? Every day, you steal flowers from My garden.”

Hearing this, Śrīmatī Rādhikā rebuked Him. “You don’t know who I am?”

Saying no more, Kṛṣṇa placed His flute to His lips and began to play, all the while glancing sweetly at Rādhājī as He walked away. Watching Kṛṣṇa leave greatly distressed Rādhājī, who fainted in separation from Him. Lalitājī thought that Rādhājī had been stung by a black serpent, and when She did not regain consciousness after several attempts to revive Her, all the *sakhīs* became very worried. Just then, Kṛṣṇa arrived disguised as a snake charmer. He removed the effect of the poison by chanting *mantras* and whispered in Śrīmatījī’s ear, “I have come. Just see.” Hearing this, Śrīmatī Rādhikā immediately sat up. When She saw Kṛṣṇa nearby, She began to smile. An ocean of bliss welled up in the hearts of the *sakhīs*. This *līlā* took place here.

Sāhasī Kuṇḍa

Some distance to the east of Phulvārī Kuṇḍa is Vilāsa Vaṭa, and east of Vilāsa Vaṭa is Sāhasī Kuṇḍa. Here, Kṛṣṇa used to meet with Śrīmatī Rādhikā and the *sakhīs* encouraged and arranged for Rādhājī to meet with Kṛṣṇa. *Sāhasī* means ‘bold’ or ‘resolute’. The *sakhīs* would hang a beautiful swing from the nearby *vaṭa vṛkṣa* (banyan tree), and swing Śrī Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa while singing songs in *malhāra* and other *rāgas*.

Another name of Sāhasī Kuṇḍa is Sārasī Kuṇḍa. Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma would always remain together. They would eat together, play together, and even sleep together. Once, the two brothers were playing here when Yaśodā Maiyā came looking for Them. With great affection she addressed Them as a pair of *sāras*, or swans. Since then, this *kuṇḍa* has been called Sārasī Kuṇḍa. Near this *kuṇḍa* are Śyāmapīparī Kuṇḍa, Vaṭa Kadamba, Kyārī Vaṭa Kuṇḍa and numerous other *kuṇḍas*. There used to be a *kyārī* (grove) of banyan trees here.

Ṭer Kadamba

This place is situated exactly half-way between Nandagaon and Jāvaṭa. Being a place of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa’s *rāsa-līlā*, a *rāsa-maṇḍala* platform has been constructed here in memory of this *līlā*. While grazing the cows in the afternoon, Kṛṣṇa used to climb this *kadamba* tree and call Śyāmalī, Dhaulī, Pītāambarī, Kālindī and His other dear cows with His flute. Hearing Kṛṣṇa’s call, all the cows would assemble here immediately, and Kṛṣṇa would count them on His *maṇi-mālā*. If some cows were missing, He would again call out their names by sounding His flute, and only when they were all assembled would He return home with the herd.

Sometimes, in the gentle light of the full-moon night, Kṛṣṇa would climb this *kadamba* tree and call the *sakhīs* by playing their names on the sweet notes of His flute. These *gopīs* would forget their bodies, minds and worldly cares, arriving to meet Kṛṣṇa in a spell-bound condition. They would then perform *rāsa-vilāsa* with Kṛṣṇa, which was full of singing and dancing.

Since Kṛṣṇa climbed a *kadamba* tree and called (*ṭerā*) the cows and *gopīs* here, this place is known as Ṭer Kadamba. There used to be many *kadamba* trees here, but they have all disappeared on account of stagnant rainwater. *Mahātmās* who perform *bhajana* here periodically plant *kadamba* trees at this place.

On the day of Gopāṣṭamī, the Brajabāsīs bring small Brajabāsī boys dressed up like Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma from Nandagaon to this place and stage a programme of congregational singing called *samāja*. They also worship the cows beautifully and feed them grass and jaggery (*guḍa*).

Śrī Rūpa Gosvāmī's *bhajana-kuṭī*

Adjacent to Kadamba Ṭer, to the west, is the *bhajana-kuṭī* of Śrī Rūpa Gosvāmī. He often performed *bhajana* here at this secluded place, remembering Kṛṣṇa's sweet pastimes. He also composed many of his treasured books here. Whenever the emotions of deep separation from *mahābhāvamayī* Śrīmatī Rādhikā manifested in his heart, *śloka*s of separation would emanate from his mouth. At that time, all the leaves of the *kadamba* tree here would dry up in the fire of separation and fall to the ground. And when the meeting of the Divine Couple manifested in his heart, he would recite *śloka*s of Their meeting. At this time, the *kadamba* would sprout new leaves.

Once, Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī came here to meet with Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī. They began to talk about Kṛṣṇa's *rasamayī līlā* and became so absorbed in *kṛṣṇa-kathā* that they forgot about the time. In the afternoon, when their absorption abated somewhat, Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī thought, "It is time to honour *prasāda*, but I have nothing to offer Śrī Sanātana Gosvāmī." He therefore became somewhat concerned. Just then, a beautiful girl in an ordinary dress came there and said to Rūpa Gosvāmī, "Bābā, My mother has sent rice, milk and sugar with Me. Quickly make *khīra* (sweet-rice) and eat." Saying this, the girl left. When a short while later She returned, She said, "Bābā, because you have been talking, you have no time to cook. Therefore, I will cook for you." She collected some dry cow-dung patties that were nearby and produced fire simply by Her breathing. In little time, She presented Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī with very sweet and fragrant *khīra* and said, "Bābā, offer this to Ṭhākuraṇī and quickly take some yourself. I must go, or else My mother will chastise Me for being late." And the beautiful girl departed.

Śrī Rūpa Gosvāmī offered the *khīra* to Kṛṣṇa and placed it before Sanātana Gosvāmī. When the two brothers drank the *khīra*, *sphūrtis* of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa immediately manifested in their hearts. They began to lament, calling out, "Hā Rādhē! Hā Rādhē!" Sanātana Gosvāmī said, "I have never eaten *khīra* like this before. Rūpa, did you desire something to eat? That *kīśorī* was none other than *mahā-bhāvamayī kṛṣṇa-priyā* Śrīmatī Rādhikāṇī. In the future, please don't trouble Her like this." Śrī Rūpa Gosvāmī began to

lament, understanding his fault. When he took a little rest, Śrīmatī Rādhikā appeared in his dream and pacified him with sweet words.

Nanda Bāga

Nearby, south of Śrī Rūpa Gosvāmī's *bhajana-kuṭī* is Nanda Bāga, Nanda Mahārāja's garden. This garden was full of lush green trees and creepers laden with many varieties of fruits and flowers. One of Nanda Mahārāja's *gośālās* was also here, where Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma milked the cows and practised wrestling with the *sakhās* in its wrestling ground. Śrīmatī Rādhikā used to come along this path together with Her girlfriends on Her way from Jāvaṭa to Nanda Bhavan.

Once, Śrīmatī Rādhikā and Her *sakhīs* were coming to Nanda Bhavan to cook. Some distance from this place, they saw Kṛṣṇa and the cowherd boys milking the cows. Lalitā Sakhī said, "We should take the other path. Braja's *lampaṭa cūḍāmaṇi* (crown-jewel among debauchees) is looking to-wards us with greedy eyes as He milks the cows. He will certainly tease us in one way or another. We should avoid this place by using the other path."

But Rādhikājī insisted, "What can that debauchee do? We should fearlessly take this path." Saying this, She and her friends at once began to walk in Kṛṣṇa's direction. As Śrīmatī Rādhikā came close, Kṛṣṇa aimed a current of milk at Her face and drenched it. Waves of pleasure surged within the *sakhās* and *sakhīs*, who all began to laugh. Śrīmatī Rādhikā knitted Her eyebrows and looked towards Kṛṣṇa. As She proceeded a little further, Her pearl necklace somehow broke and the pearls fell to the earth, scattering here and there. She sat down and began to collect them. The *sakhīs*, understanding Śrīmatījī's heart, knew that on the pretext of picking up pearls, She was actually having a longer *darśana* of Her *priyatama*.

Remembrance of this *līlā* is like an ocean, and Śrī Rūpa Gosvāmī has placed many such oceans in the pot of his *Ujjvala-nīlamanī* and other books. In other words, in his books he has described these vast pastimes in a few words.

Āśīṣeśvara Mahādeva

A short distance to the east of Nanda Bāga is Āśīṣeśvara Mahādeva and Āśīṣeśvara Kuṇḍa. Parjanya Mahārāja used to bathe here and worship Āśīṣeśvara Mahādeva who fulfills all desires. Āśīṣeśvara Mahādeva easily becomes pleased even by a little worship and bestows blessings (*āśīṣa*) by which all of one's desires may be fulfilled. Some Brajabāsīs also say that it was by the blessings of Āśīṣeśvara Mahādeva that Parjanya Mahārāja had five sons endowed with all good qualities and had such a highly qualified grandson as Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

Jalvihāra Kuṇḍa

This *kuṇḍa* lies to the west of Āśīṣeśvara Kuṇḍa. Kṛṣṇa and the *sakhās* play in Jalvihāra Kuṇḍa.

Jogiyā Sthala

This very charming place, surrounded by trees and creepers, lies north-east of Kṛṣṇa Kuṇḍa. Mahādeva Śaṅkara worships Kṛṣṇa here, and therefore this place is also known as Mahādevajī's *baithaka*. Once, Mahādeva Śaṅkara, desiring to have Kṛṣṇa's *darśana*, was wandering throughout Braja like a madman. However, he was unsuccessful even after making repeated attempts. Sometimes, Kṛṣṇa would be sleeping when he arrived and sometimes He would be sucking the breast of His mother. Also, mother Yaśodā did not want to show her baby Kṛṣṇa to this strange *yogī*, whose hair was matted, who was adorned with a necklace of serpents, and who was riding a bull and carrying a trident in his hand. She thought that he might give her son the 'evil eye'.

Finally, a defeated Śaṅkara sat down right here and decided not to leave until his desire was fulfilled. He started to beg by invoking the name of God, loudly calling out, "*Alakha niraṣjana! Alakha niraṣjana!*" and playing on his *ḍamarū* drum. Baby Kṛṣṇa in Nanda Bhavan also started to bawl just as loudly as Śaṅkara was calling out and playing his drum. The drum playing did not stop; nor did Kṛṣṇa's crying. Finally, the clever elderly *gopīs* advised Yaśodājī, "This must be the work of that *yogī*. He certainly knows some *mantras*, so why not call him to pacify the child?" They went to the *yogī* and said, "*Are yogī! Nandarānī Yaśomatī is calling you to Nanda Bhavan. Come!*" Hearing this, Śaṅkarajī became very happy and made his way to Nanda Bhavan, where he took some mustard seeds and salt in his hands, touched the head of baby Kṛṣṇa, and blessed Him. When touched by the hands of Śaṅkara, Nandalālā immediately stopped crying and began to laugh and make a joyful sound. Seeing this wonderful act of the *yogī*, Nandarānī became very pleased with him and gave him her pearl necklace in charity, saying, "*Yogī, you should stay here at Nanda Bhavan and, whenever my lālā cries, you should give Him your darśana to pacify Him.*"

Sūradāsa has described this pastime in the following poem, which is filled with *bhāva*:

*cal re jogī nandabhavan mein yasumati tohi bulāve
laṭkat-laṭkat saṅkar āvai man mein mod baḍhāve
nandabhavan mein āyo jogī rāī non kar līno
bār pher lālāke ūpar hāth śīs par dīno
vithā bhaī ab dūr badan kī kilak uṭhe nandalālā
khuśī bhaī nandajū kī rānī dīnī motiyan mālā
rahure jogī nandabhavan mein braj ko bāso kijai
jab-jab mero lālā rovai tab-tab darśan dijai
tum to jogī param manohar tum ko ved bakhāne
(śiv bole) būḍho bābā nām hamāro sūrsyām mohi jāneñ*

Kṛṣṇa Kuṇḍa

This very beautiful pond within a dense grove of *kadamba* trees is situated near Nandīśvara Hill to the east. Śrī Kṛṣṇa used to enjoy water-sports (*jal-kṛīḍā*) here with His friends. On the northern bank of this *kuṇḍa* is the path

He took to go cow-grazing. Kṛṣṇa also used to bring His thirsty cows here to drink water. Chīta Svāmī has described this cow-grazing *līlā* in a very heart-touching way:

*āgeṇ gāy pācheṇ gāy it gāy ut gāy
govind ko gāyanhoṇ meṇ basvo ko bhāvai
gāyan ke saṅg dhāveṇ gāyan meṇ sacupāveṇ
gāyan kī khur raj aṅsoṇ lagāveṇ
gāyan soṇ vraj chāyau vaikuṇṭh hu bisrāyau
gāyan ke het kar lai uṭhāve
chīt svāmī giridhārī viṭṭhaleṣ vapudhārī
gvāriyā ko bheṣ dhareṇ gāyan meṇ āve*

“The cows are in front of, behind and on either side of Govinda, who likes to sit in their midst. He runs with the cows, takes rest with them, and smears the dust of their hooves over His body. He so much relishes the company of the cows in Braja that He even forgets Vaikuṇṭha. He lifted Govardhana with His own hand to protect the cows. The lord of Chīta Svāmī, Giridhārī Viṭṭhaleṣa, assumes the form of a cowherd boy and appears in the dynasty of *gopas*.”

When Uddhavaṇ arrived in Nandagaon, he spent the entire night consoling Nanda and Yaśodā at Nanda Bhavan. At the *brāhma-muhūrta* hour, he came to this *kuṇḍa*, bathed, and sat down on the southern bank to perform his morning *sandhyā āhnika*. At that time, he saw the *gopīs* who were hiding in the *kadamba-kyārī* nearby and, after completing his *āhnika*, went there to meet them.

Chācha Kuṇḍa (Jhagaḍākī Kuṇḍa)

A short distance to the north-west of Kṛṣṇa Kuṇḍa is the place where Kṛṣṇa and the *sakhās* used to beg the *gopīs* for *chācha*, or buttermilk. The *gopīs* would offer them this *chācha* with love, and the *sakhās* would drink it up right on the spot. Sometimes, the boys used to fight and quarrel (*jhagaḍanā*) among themselves, saying, “Let me have some first! Let me have some first!” Because this childhood *līlā* took place here, the name of this *kuṇḍa* became Chācha Kuṇḍa, or Jhagaḍākī Kuṇḍa.

Sūrya Kuṇḍa

This *kuṇḍa* lies to the south of Kṛṣṇa Kuṇḍa, on the right-hand side of the highway. Here, Sūrya-Nārāyaṇa became restless after having *darśana* of Śrī Kṛṣṇa’s exquisite three-fold-bending form (*tribhaṅga-lalita*) and forgot to move for some time.

Lalitā Kuṇḍa

To the east of Sūrya Kuṇḍa, within the lush, green forest, lies a very attractive *kuṇḍa*. This is Lalitājī’s bathing-place. Sometimes, Lalitājī, devising some clever trick, would bring Rādhikā here to meet with Kṛṣṇa. This *kuṇḍa* is situated east of Nandagaon.

Once, Kṛṣṇa warned Śrīmatī Rādhikā to be cautious of Devarṣi Nārada. “Devarṣi is a *ṛṣi* whose nature is very complicated,” He said. “Sometimes he causes disputes between father and son, mother and father, husband and wife. It is best to remain cautious of him.” But Śrīmatījī did not take Kṛṣṇa’s words seriously.

So it happened that one day Lalitājī picked *belī*, *camelī* and other flowers from the forest and began to string a beautiful garland for Kṛṣṇa. After completing it, she discarded it and began to string a new garland. She repeated this many times. Nāradaājī was hiding behind some trees, watching this surprising scene. He approached Lalitājī and asked her about her unusual behaviour. Lalitājī said, “Every time I complete the garland, I feel that it is either too short or too long for Kṛṣṇa. This is why I keep starting again.”

The mischievous Nāradaājī suggested, “Kṛṣṇa is playing nearby. Why don’t you make Him sit beside you and string your garland by measuring it against Him?” Lalitājī agreed and called for Kṛṣṇa. Then she strung a beautiful garland for Him that was just the right size, and placed it around His neck. They waited for Rādhājī, who had earlier asked Lalitājī to make a garland and had told her that She would come as soon as the garland was finished. However, Rādhājī was delayed because the *sakhīs* were still busy decorating Her.

Previously, Śrī Kṛṣṇa had given a boon to Nāradaājī, who had wanted to have *darśana* of Kṛṣṇa swinging with Lalitājī. Nārada now reminded Kṛṣṇa of His promise and repeatedly requested Him to sit with Lalitājī on a nearby swing. On Nāradaājī’s request, they both sat down and started swinging as they waited for Rādhikā. Meanwhile, Devarṣi went to Śrīmatī Rādhikā, singing the *kīrtana*, “Lalitā-Kṛṣṇa *kī jaya ho!* Lalitā-Kṛṣṇa *kī jaya ho!*” Śrīmatī Rādhikā offered *praṇāma* to Devarṣi Nārada and inquired, “Devarṣi! Today you are very happily singing the glories of Lalitā and Kṛṣṇa. It seems that you have some astonishing news. What is it?” Smiling, Nāradaājī exclaimed, “Oh, what a beautiful scene! Kṛṣṇa, wearing a beautiful *vanamālā*, is swinging with Lalitājī. If You don’t believe me, then go there and see for Yourself.” Disbelieving Nāradaājī’s words, Śrīmatījī went there Herself. “How can He swing with Lalitā in My absence?” She thought. From afar, She could see Kṛṣṇa and Lalitā swinging together. Angered, She returned to Her *kuṣja* and sat down, deeply immersed in *māna*.

After waiting for Rādhājī for a long time, Kṛṣṇa finally came to look for Her. He told Her about Nāradaājī’s activities and how it happened that He was swinging with Lalitā, and thus somehow pacified Her *māna*. He took Her to the swing and began to swing with Her, as Lalitā and Viśākhā pushed Them. This sweet *līlā* took place here. Nārada Kuṇḍa and the place where Lalitā and Kṛṣṇa swung lie near this *kuṇḍa*.

Uddhava Kyārī (Viśākhā Kuṣja)

This place, which is also known as Kadamba Kyārī, is situated a short distance from Lalitā Kuṇḍa to the south-east. Actually, this is the *kuṣja* of Viśākhājī, and nearby lies Viśākhā Kuṇḍa. In this secluded and beautiful place surrounded by *kadamba* trees, Viśākhājī used to arrange meetings between Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. Sometimes, Kṛṣṇa also used to perform *rāsa-līlā* here with Rādhājī and Her friends. There is a *rāsa-vedī* here reminding us of that *rāsa-līlā*. Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa also enjoyed many kinds of *jal-vihāra* in the clear and fragrant water of Viśākhā Kuṇḍa.

After Śrī Kṛṣṇa's departure to Mathurā, all of Braja drowned in an ocean of separation. What to speak of the *gopas* and *gopīs*, even the birds and animals gave up eating and drinking, feeling distressed in separation from Kṛṣṇa. Kṛṣṇa's beloved *gopīs* followed Akrūra's chariot to this point and then fell to the ground unconscious. They never returned home again. Grievously afflicted by separation from Kṛṣṇa, Rādhājī stayed in this dense forest in seclusion. In the hope of Kṛṣṇa's return, She counted each passing day, remaining on the verge of death. At that time, Kṛṣṇa's messenger Uddhavajī came here to console the *gopīs* but, upon seeing Śrīmatī Rādhikā's state of separation, he paid his obeisances to Her from afar, unable to say anything.

Acutely afflicted by separation, Śrīmatī Rādhikā saw a bumble-bee and thought it to be Kṛṣṇa's messenger. In the state of *divyonmāda*, She started manifesting *citrajalpa*, *prajalpa* and other moods of transcendental madness. Sometimes She chastised the bee, and sometimes She complained to it. Sometimes She gave the bee instructions, sometimes respects and sometimes inquired from it about the well-being of Her beloved. Uddhava was amazed to see and hear all this. He had come as a *guru* to give instructions, but instead he became a disciple. To console the *gopīs*, he relayed some of Kṛṣṇa's messages to them, but this only intensified their pain of separation. They said, *udho man na bhayo das bīs, ek huto so gayo śyām saṅga, ko ārādhe īśa*. "Uddhava, we don't each have ten or twenty hearts. We had only one, which has now gone away along with Śyāma. With which heart shall we now worship God?" They also said, *udho joga kahān rākheṇ yahān rom rom śyām hai*. "Uddhava, how can we perform *yoga* when Śyāma pervades every particle in our bodies?"

In the end, Uddhavajī desired to take birth in Braja in the form of a small shrub, creeper or blade of grass so that he could be blessed with the dust of the *gopīs'* feet. He worshipped their footdust as follows:

*āsām aho caraṇa-reṇu-juṣām ahaṁ syām
vṛndāvane kim api gulma-latauśadhīnām
yā dustyajam sva-janam ārya-pathaśca hitvā
bhejur mukunda-padavīm śrutibhir vimṛgyām*

(Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 10.47.61)

"If I become a shrub, creeper or medicinal herb here in Vṛndāvana, it will be my great fortune. Oh! I shall then be able to serve the dust of these *gopīs'* feet, and will be blessed by bathing in that footdust. These *gopīs* are the

most fortunate of all. They have given up those things that are extremely difficult to renounce – their relatives, religious principles prescribed in the *Vedas*, and acceptable social conduct. Having become so completely absorbed in Kṛṣṇa, they have obtained His supreme *prema* and become as worshipable as Him.”

*vande nanda-vraja-strīṇāṃ
pāda-reṇum abhīkṣṇaśaḥ
yāsāṃ hari-kathodgītāṃ
punāti bhuvana-trayam*

(Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 10.47.63)

“I bow down to the dust of the feet of the *gopīs* residing in Nanda Bābā’s Braja. Oh! Whatever these *gopīs* have sung about Kṛṣṇa’s pastimes is purifying the whole world and will continue to do so.”

This pastime-place is filled with the *rasa* of topmost meeting (*mahā-sambhoga*) and at the same time, it is filled with the *rasa* of the highest degree of separation (*mahā-vipralambha*). The life of a *sādhaka* becomes successful by taking *darśana* of and touching this place.

Pūrṇamāsījī kī Gufā (Pūrṇamāsījī’s cave)

To the south-east of Viśākhā Kuṣja, or Kadamba Kyārī, and about one mile from Nandagaon is the *kuṇḍa* and *kuṭīra* of Pūrṇamāsījī. At the time of *kṛṣṇa-līlā*, she lived at this secluded place away from the village as an old *tapasvinī* wearing saffron cloth. Nanda and the other Brajabāsīs had great respect for her and took her blessings before under-taking any important activity. Before coming to Braja, Pūrṇamāsījī used to live in Avantīpurī with her husband and her son Sāndīpani Muni. Madhumaṅgala and Nāndī-mukhī are Sāndīpani Muni’s son and daughter. Pūrṇamāsījī came to Nandagaon before Kṛṣṇa’s birth with her grandson Madhumaṅgala and her granddaughter Nāndīmukhī. Every morning, she came to Nanda Bhavan to have *darśana* of Kṛṣṇa and bless Him. In *prakaṭa-līlā*, Kṛṣṇa’s manifest pastimes, she is Nāradaījī’s disciple. She is the personification of Śrī Kṛṣṇa’s *samaṣṭi līlā-śakti* (collective pastime-potency), which belongs to the *svaṛūpa-śakti*, and she nourishes all of Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa Yugala’s pastimes.

Nāndīmukhī’s place of residence

Near Pūrṇamāsī’s cave is the place of residence of Nāndīmukhī, the granddaughter of Pūrṇamāsījī, who also supports and nourishes Kṛṣṇa’s pastimes in various ways.

Ḍomanavana and Runakī-Jhunakī Kuṇḍa

Adjacent to Pūrṇamāsījī’s cave is Ḍomanavana, which is also the location of Runakī-Jhunakī Kuṇḍa. The word *ḍomana* means ‘by two minds’. Rādhā’s mind and Kṛṣṇa’s mind met here, and therefore this place is known as Ḍomana. The *kuṣja* of the two *sakhīs* Runakī and Jhunakī lies here. These two

sakhīs used to arrange Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa's meeting here by using various tricks. With great happiness, they would sit Them on the *jhūlā* and swing Them.

One devotee has described these *līlās* in his poem full of *prema*:

*it soṅ āi kumri kiśorī ut soṅ nandakiśor
do mil van krīḍā karat bolat pañchī mor*

"Kumārī Kiśorī came from one direction and Nandakiśora from the other. They are playing together in the forest, accompanied by the calls of the peacocks."

Chapter 11

Jāvaṭa (Yāva Grāma)

Jāvaṭa, or Yāva Grāma, lies approximately two miles east of Nandagaon and is where Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa Yugala perform Their secret pastimes (*vilāsa*). To describe all the pastimes that took place here is impossible. Sometimes, during *vilāsa* under a *vaṭa* tree, *rasika* Śrī Kṛṣṇa would adorn His chest with the *jāvaka*, red paint, from Śrī Rādhikājī's lotus feet. That place which is decorated with that same *vaṭa* tree is famous by the name Jāvaṭa or Yāva Grāma.¹

Jaṭilā Gopī used to live in this village with her son Abhimanyu and daughter Kuṭilā. Mahārāja Vṛṣabhānu Gopa married his beloved daughter, Śrī Rādhikā, to Jaṭilā's son Abhimanyu on the instruction of Yogamāyā Purṇamāsījī. Although Abhimanyu had the conception of being Śrī Rādhikā's husband, by the power of Bhagavatī Yogamāyā he was not able even to touch Her shadow. Instead, out of embarrassment, he always kept himself busy, looking after his cows in the *gośālā* or spending time with his friends. Jaṭilā and Kuṭilā also remained actively engaged in household chores. The clever *sakhīs* would arrange meetings between Śrīmatī Rādhikā and Śrī Kṛṣṇa by varieties of tricks and excuses. These meetings were actually accomplished by Yogamāyā to nourish the *rasa* of *parakīyā-bhāva*.

Śrīmatī Rādhikā is the embodiment of Śrī Kṛṣṇa's *hlādinī-śakti* (pleasure giving potency), and the crown-jewel of Kṛṣṇa's eternal beloveds. Fire and its power to burn, or the sun and its light, are intrinsically one in nature and cannot be separated from each other. Similarly, Śrī Kṛṣṇa and His *parā-śakti* Śrī Rādhājī are eternally non-different and inseparable from each other; one soul manifests into two forms solely to taste *rasa-vilāsa*. Rāvaṇa could not so much as touch the original Sītā. He was only able to kidnap her shadow. One can reconcile Abhimanyu and Śrīmatī Rādhikā's relationship in the same way.

Mahārāja Vṛṣabhānu built a beautiful royal palace for his darling daughter in Jāvaṭa, in which Śrīmatījī lived happily with Her girlfriends. Every morning, Mukharājī used to come here to see her beloved granddaughter. *Bhakti-ratnākara* gives very sweet and touching accounts of these *līlās*.²

One day, Śrī Kṛṣṇa could not meet with Rādhikā because She was in *māna*, and He became very restless in separation from Her. On the advice of

Viśākhā, He disguised Himself as a *brāhmaṇa* student. Wearing a sacred thread across His shoulder and wooden shoes on His feet, and carrying a begging bowl and *daṇḍa* in His hands and a book under His arm, He arrived at the door of Jaṭilā's house in Jāvaṭa and began begging by calling out God's name. Since it was morning time and Jaṭilā and Kuṭilā were making cow-dung patties, they had not yet taken bath. They could not give any *bhikṣā*, alms, because they were unclean; they therefore called Rādhikā and ordered Her to give *bhikṣā* to the *brāhmaṇa*. Rādhikā, however, refused to come before a man other than Her husband. The young beggar had His own unique style. He said, "Maiyā! I cannot stay here very long. I can only wait for as long as it takes to milk a cow and no longer, so now it's time for Me to go."

Jaṭilā thought, "If this young *brāhmaṇa* leaves empty-handed, it will be very inauspicious for my family. The cows or any of my family members could die." She entered the house and very sweetly explained the situation to her daughter-in-law and repeatedly requested Her to give the mendicant some alms. She then returned to making cow-dung patties. Śrīmatī Rādhikā covered Her face with Her veil and carried a plate of flour, lentils and vegetables to the door. Lalitā, Viśākhā and the other *sakhīs* accompanied Her. When She tried to offer the beggar alms, He humbly petitioned Her: "I have no need for these alms. Please place Your precious *māna* in My begging bowl." Now Priyājī understood everything. She smiled, uncovered Her face a little and emptied the whole plate on top of His head. Delighted, the young beggar went His way, meditating upon the *bhikṣā* He had just received from Rādhikā.

The following pastime also took place here. Once, mother Yaśodā was in her storeroom, arranging some *lahaṅgas* (skirts), *colīs* (blouses), shawls and other expensive clothes and ornaments in a large chest, when mischievous Kṛṣṇa burst into the room. He came up behind her, put His arms around her neck and insisted on knowing what she was doing. "Maiyā! Is it My birthday today?" He asked. "Are you preparing all of these clothes and ornaments for Me?"

"Go and play now," Maiyā answered with some irritation. "Don't disturb me." Hearing this, Kṛṣṇa felt somewhat dejected and left, only to secretly observe what His mother was doing. Mother Yaśodā was preparing this box to send to Śrīmatī Rādhikā in Jāvaṭa. She would occasionally send such gifts to please the hard-hearted Jaṭilā, so that she would not prohibit her daughter-in-law from coming to Nanda Bhavan. Clever Śrī Kṛṣṇa understood this fact, so when Maiyā finish-ed packing the chest and became absorbed in other house-hold chores, Kṛṣṇa made His way with Subala Sakhā to the room in which the chest lay. They unlocked the chest and removed its contents, and Kṛṣṇa climbed inside instead. Subala closed the lid and locked it as before. Yaśodājī had requested Abhimanyu to personally come and collect the box because it was filled with expensive gifts and should not be given to anyone else. Abhimanyu put the box on his head and with great difficulty carried it to his mother in Jāvaṭa Grāma. Jaṭilā said, "My son, this box is filled with very

expensive clothes and ornaments for my daughter-in-law, so put it in Her room.” He happily placed the box in Śrīmatī Rādhikā’s room and left. When the *sakhīs* eagerly opened the box and saw the mischievous Śyāmasundara inside, they burst out laughing. Their bliss knew no bounds. With intense *prema*, Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa met and the *sakhīs* felt great satisfaction.

Once, Śrīmatī Rādhikā was in *māna* and did not meet Kṛṣṇa for a few days. The *sakhīs* tried various means to convince Her to give up Her *māna*, but this time Her *māna* was very firm and therefore difficult to subdue. Kṛṣṇa’s separation from Rādhā filled Him with great distress. Seeing this, Subala Sakhā began to hatch a plan to help Him meet with Rādhājī. Subala exactly resembles Śrīmatī Rādhikā in age, beauty, speech and so forth and is skilled in many arts. He consoled Kṛṣṇa, saying, “Why are You so distressed? You should wait in this *kuṣja* for a short time while I arrange Your meeting with Priyājī.” Saying this, he went to Yāva Grāma. When Jaṭilā saw him there, she cried out, “Are Subala! You are the friend of that licentious debauchee Kṛṣṇa; why are you hovering around our house? Quickly go away from here!”

Subala replied, “Maiyā! One of my calves is lost and I cannot find him anywhere. I have come to search for him.”

Jaṭilā answered, “Your calf hasn’t come here. Leave at once!” Subala repeatedly requested her to please allow him to look until she finally relented. “I am going now to make cow-dung patties. Go to the cowshed and search for your calf. If you find him, take him.”

Subalājī became very happy and reached Śrīmatī Rādhikā’s balcony through the cowshed. He gave such a heart-rending description of Kṛṣṇa’s condition of separation that Śrīmatījī’s heart melted. She immediately gave up Her *māna* and prepared Herself to go and console Kṛṣṇa, but how would She be able to leave Her house? Subala then gave Her his clothes and She disguised Herself as him, carrying a stick and wearing a twisted turban on Her head, a *dhotī* around Her waist, and a *guṣṭā-mālā* around Her neck. Carrying a small calf in Her arms, it appeared like Subala was happily leaving, having found his lost calf. Śrīmatī Rādhikā was carrying the calf in Her arms in such a way that no one would notice Her breasts and become suspicious. Meanwhile, Subala, disguised as Rādhikā, became immersed in conversation with the *sakhīs*. When Jaṭilā saw Śrīmatījī disguised as Subala leaving the cowshed, she asked, “So, did you find your calf?”

Rādhikājī answered in Subala’s voice, “Maiyā! Just see, I have found it.” Jaṭilā did not become even the slightest bit suspicious. Śrīmatī Rādhikā finally reached Kṛṣṇa, having made Her way to the location hinted at by Subala. Distressed in separation, Kṛṣṇa asked Her, “*Sakhe*, were you unable to bring My beloved? My life is coming to an end! What should I do? Where should I go?” Upon seeing Kṛṣṇa in such a miserable condition, Śrīmatījī could not control Herself. She put the calf down and embraced Him. By Her tender touch and by the fragrance of Her body, Kṛṣṇa understood everything and all His sorrow went far away. He praised the intelligence of Subala again and again, and proceeded to enjoy delightful pastimes (*krīḍā-vinoda*) with His

beloved. After some time, Subala also arrived there and became very happy to see Their meeting.

Once, Śrī Kṛṣṇa's desire to meet Rādhikā was so intense that He became restless and distressed. That evening, with the hope of meeting Rādhikājī, He went to Jāvaṭa and waited outside Jaṭilā's mansion under a *ber* tree. Climbing upon a branch of that tree, He started cooing like a *kokila* (black cuckoo). Śrīmatī and Her girlfriends understood that this *kokila* was none other than Śrī Kṛṣṇa in the *ber* tree eagerly awaiting a meeting. However, as soon as Kṛṣṇa tried to enter the house, the vigilant Jaṭilā, hearing a sound, would call out, *Ko ai re?* ("Who is there?") and Kṛṣṇa would again hide in the bushes. This continued all night long, and thus Kṛṣṇa's attempts to meet with Śrīmatī Rādhikā were repeatedly foiled. In the end, He gave up hope and left, dejected.

Śrī Rūpa Gosvāmī has described this incident in his book *Ujjvala-nīlamanī* (1.16):

*saṅketī-kṛta-kokilādi-ninadam kaṁsa-dviṣaḥ kurvato
dvāronmocana-lolaṅkhavalaya-kvāṇam muhuḥ śṛṇvataḥ
keyam keyam iti pragalbha-jaratī-vākyena dūnātmano
rādhā-prāṅgaṇa-koṇa-koli-viṭapi-kroḍe gatā śarvarī*

In this verse, one *sakhī* is describing Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa's *parādhīnatā*³ of the previous night to her *priya sakhī*: "Last night, Śrī Kṛṣṇa was standing under a *ber* tree in Śrīmatī Rādhikā's courtyard, cooing like a *kokila* again and again. Śrīmatījī understood His signal but, as soon as She went to open the door, Her bangles and ankle-bells sounded. Śrī Kṛṣṇa also heard them. Then, from inside the house, haughty old Jaṭilā would repeatedly call out, 'Who is there?' Hearing her loud call, Śrī Kṛṣṇa, with a distressed heart, spent the whole night under that *ber* tree."

May Śrī Yāva Grāma be victorious as it conceals such sweet memories.

Jaṭilā kī Havelī (Jaṭilā's house)

In the western part of the village, on a high hillock, is the *havelī* of Jaṭilā, in which there are *mūrtis* of Jaṭilā, Kuṭilā and Abhimanyu. Now a temple of Rādhā-Kāntajī is also there. The *sakhīs* arrange meetings between Śrīmatījī and Kṛṣṇa here by deceiving Jaṭilā, Kuṭilā and Abhimanyu.

Khiḍaka (Vatsakhora)

On the pretext of having lost his calf, Subala Sakhā deceived Jaṭilā and sent Śrīmatī Rādhikā, disguised as him, to meet with Kṛṣṇa. Even today, this *khiḍaka* (*gośālā*) of Abhimanyu is known by the name Vatsakhora.

Beriyā

This place is situated near the *gośālā*. Within the dense *kuṣṇas* here was a *ber* tree. Once, Kṛṣṇa waited here all night long to meet with Śrīmatī Rādhikā.

Pānihārī Kuṇḍa

North of Beriṃyā is Pānihārī Kuṇḍa. The *gopīs* used to come here to fetch water. *Pāni* means ‘water’, and *hārī* means ‘taking’. Sometimes, Kṛṣṇa met with the *gopīs* here.

Mukharā Mārga

Every morning, Mukharājī joyfully trod this path (*mārga*) to visit her granddaughter Rādhikā and bestow blessings upon Her. She would then return by the same path.

Kuṭilā Dūṣaṇa Sthāna

This is where Jaṭilā’s daughter Kuṭilā, due to her wicked nature, would always direct all kinds of criticism (*dūṣaṇa*) at Śrīmatī Rādhikā. She would falsely accuse Rādhikā of various transgressions. Once, she saw Rādhikā meeting with Kṛṣṇa at this place. She locked Them inside the room and created an uproar by which she was able to gather together Pūrṇimā, as well as her mother Jaṭilā, older brother Abhimanyu and younger brother Durmada. She announced to them that she had locked the disgraced young bride in this room together with Kṛṣṇa. When the door was opened, however, everyone saw Rādhājī worshipping a *mūrti* of Kālī. What happened next? They all began to chastise Kuṭilā for making false accusations. Kuṭilā pulled a long face and walked away.

Rādhikā Gamana Patha

Rādhikājī and Her *sakhīs* used to pass by here on their way for Sūrya-pūjā, worship of the Sun god. Along the road is Kadamba Kānana, where Kṛṣṇa would eagerly approach Rādhikājī. As She tried to escape, He would tug at the corner of Her cloth to stop Her. This pastime is described in *Bhakti-ratnākara*.⁴

Pīvana Kuṇḍa

This *kuṇḍa* lies in the middle of Kadamba Kānana, where the eager Kṛṣṇa, guided by the *sakhīs*, drank the nectar of Śrīmatī Rādhikā’s lips. This *kuṇḍa* is therefore called Pīvana Kuṇḍa, and is the witness to the Divine Couple’s amorous pastimes (*vilāsa*). The word *pīvana* means ‘to drink’ or ‘water’. *Bhakti-ratnākara* describes this incident.⁵

Kṛṣṇa Kuṇḍa

This *kuṇḍa*, which is surrounded by dense banyan trees, provides a concealed setting for various *līlā-vilāsa* of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa Yugala. It lies in the southern part of Jāvaṭa.

Once, Śrī Kṛṣṇa came here to swing with Śrīmatī Rādhikā and Her girlfriends under these closely-packed banyan trees. The *sakhīs* arrived a little late, so *rasika* Kṛṣṇa considered what type of mischief He could make. Today,

without waiting for the *sakhīs*, He Himself hung a swing from the branch of a tree and then asked Śrīmatījī to sit on it. However, the swing was so high that She was unable to climb up on it. On the pretext of putting Her on the swing, Śrī Kṛṣṇa lifted Her up in His arms and embraced Her. Thus, even before the swing-festival began, the Youthful Couple submerged Themselves in waves of *rasa*. At that moment, the *sakhīs* arrived at this swing-festival laughing and joking, and they too drowned in *rasa*.

Lāḍalī Kuṇḍa

At this place, Lalitājī secretly arranged meetings between Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa Yugala.

Nārada Kuṇḍa

Here, Durvāsā Ṛṣi gave Śrīmatī Rādhikā the boon that She would become *amṛta hastā*. This meant that whatever She cooked with Her own hands would at once become like *amṛta*, or divine nectar, and whoever partook of this food would become immortal, invincible, greatly valiant and able to defeat everyone, including both demigods and demons. This narration is found in *Padma Purāṇa*.

Gocāraṇa Patha

Śrī Kṛṣṇa and His *sakhās* used to go cowherding (*gocāraṇa*) and return home along this path. At this time, Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, unobserved by everyone else, would meet with each other. A deep reading of the following *śloka* found in *Śrī Padyāvalī* reveals how They would achieve this:

*phullendīvara-kāntim indu-vadanam barhāvataṁsa-priyam
śrī-vatsāṅkam udāra-kaustubha-dharam pītāmbaram sundaram
gopīnām nayanotpalārcita-tanum go-gopa-saṅghāvṛtam
govindam kala-veṇu-vādana-param divyāṅga-bhūṣam bhaje*

“I worship Govinda, whose complexion is the colour of a blossoming blue lotus, whose face is like the moon, who is fond of wearing a peacock feather in His crown, whose chest bears the mark of Śrīvatsa and is adorned with the Kaustu-bha gem, who is attired in beautiful yellow garments, whose handsome form the *gopīs* worship with sidelong glances, whose companions are multitudes of cows and *gopas*, who plays sweet melodies on the flute, and whose body is decorated with glittering ornaments.”

Kiśorī Kuṇḍa (Rādhā Kuṇḍa)

In the eastern part of Jāvaṭa are Kiśorījī’s Mandira and Kiśorī Kuṇḍa. Sometimes, Śrī Kṛṣṇa used to indulge in *jal-kṛīḍā* here with Śrī Rādhikājī and the *sakhīs*. This *kuṇḍa* is sprinkled with the *kumkum*, *kesara* (saffron) and other *aṅga-rāga* (cosmetics) from the bodies of the *sakhīs* and is still decorated with the memories of these *līlās*, which are full of *mādhurya*.

Rāsa Maṇḍala

Here, Rādhikājī and Her *sakhīs*, being overwhelmed with *prema*, played *rāsa* and other *līlās* with the seven-year-old Kṛṣṇa.⁶

Padmāvatī Vivāha Sthala

(the place of Padmāvatī's wedding)

In this place, the jovial girls of Braja celebrated the wedding of Candrāvalī's *sakhī* Padmāvatī with Nandanandana. The heart of *kiśorī* Śrīmatī Rādhikājī is very generous. On Her indication, Lalitā and the other *sakhīs* decorated Padmāvatī as a bride and seated her on Kṛṣṇa's left. The *sakhīs* then tied the corner of Padmāvatī's veil with Kṛṣṇa's *pītāmbara* and began singing wedding songs. Padmāvatī felt very shy as She gazed upon Kṛṣṇa.

Cīra Kuṇḍa and Hiṇḍolā Sthāna (the place of the swing)

These are very attractive places situated near Kiśorī Kuṇḍa.

Pārāla Gaṅgā

This place lies in the north-western part of Jāvaṭa. Śrīmatī Rādhikājī manifested a stream of Bhagavatī Gaṅgā here. It is said that this Pārāla Gaṅgā is a *sarovara* endowed with transcendental power. On the western bank of this *kuṇḍa* is an ancient *pārijāta* tree, which blossoms in the month of Vaiśākha (March-April). It is accepted that this tree was planted by the hands of Rādhājī Herself and still exists today.

Chapter 12

Kokilāvana and Other

Pastime-places

Kokilāvana lies three miles north of Nandagaon and one mile west of Jāvaṭa. Even today, the sweet sounds of many birds – such as peacocks, peahens, *śukas*, *sārīs*, swans and cranes – can be heard in this protected and enchanting forest, and animals like deer and *nīla gāyas*, or blue cows, can be seen wandering about. The Brajabāsīs bring their vast herds of cows here for grazing. The sweet *kuhū-kuhū* of hundreds of *kokilas* (cuckoo birds) resounds in this forest. Although most forests of Braja have been destroyed, this one, with a circumference of three and a half miles, remains somewhat protected. According to *Braja-bhakti-vilāsa*, Ratnākara Sarovara and a *rāsa-maṇḍala* are situated in Kokilāvana.

Bhakti-ratnākara describes a magnificent pastime that took place here:

*jāvaṭera paścime e vana manohara
lakṣa-lakṣa kokila kūhare nirantara
eka dīna kṛṣṇa eī vanete āsiyā
kokila-saḍṛśa śabda kare harṣa haīyā
sakala kokila haīte śabda sumadhura
ye sune bāreka tāra dhairya jāya dūra
jaṭilā kahaye viśākhāre priyavāṇī
kokilera śabda aiche kabhu nāhi śuni*

*viśākhā khaye - eī mo sabhāra mane
yadi kaha e kokile dekhi giyā vane
vṛddhā kahe - jāo! śuni ullāsa aśeṣa
rāī sakhīsaha vane karilā praveśa
haila mahākautuka sukhera sīmā nāī
sakaleī āsiyā mililā eka ṭhānī
kokilera śabde kṛṣṇa mile rādhikāre
e hetu 'kokilāvana' kahaye ihāre*

Once, the very playful Śrī Kṛṣṇa eagerly desired to meet Śrīmatī Rādhikā. However, because of the watchful eyes of Her mother-in-law Jaṭilā, sister-in-law Kuṭilā and husband Abhimanyu, Śrīmatī Rādhikā could not reach the appointed meeting place. After waiting for a long time, Kṛṣṇa climbed a tall tree and began to imitate the sound of a *kokila* very sweetly. Hearing such an astonishingly loud, enthralling sound, Śrīmatī Rādhikā and the *sakhīs* understood that it was a signal from Kṛṣṇa and became very eager and restless to meet with Him. At that time, Jaṭilā addressed Viśākhā, saying, “Viśākhē! I have heard *kokilas* make all kinds of beautiful sounds, but today this *kokila* sang a wonderful melody for such a long time. I have never heard anything quite like it.”

Viśākhā replied, “Dādījī, we heard it too, and we also have never heard anything like it. This is one amazing *kokila*. If you give us permission, we would like to go out and see this extraordinary bird ourselves.” The old woman gladly gave her permission for the *sakhīs* to enter the forest. They very happily did this, and thus Kṛṣṇa was able to meet with Rādhā. This is why this place has become known as Kokilāvana.

Ratnākara Kuṇḍa

The *sakhīs* brought milk from their homes to manifest this *kuṇḍa*. Many varieties of jewels appeared from this *sarovara*, which the *sakhīs* used for Śrīmatī Rādhikā's *śṛṅgāra*.¹ This *sarovara*, which destroys all sins and bestows an abundance of wealth and affluence, can give devotees the greatest jewel of all – Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa Yugala's causeless *bhakti*.

Rāsa Maṇḍala

Śrī Kṛṣṇa performed *rāsa-līlā* with the *gopīs* here, after which they played in the water of Ratnākara Kuṇḍa.

Āṣjanauka

This is Śrī Viśākhā Sakhī's place of residence. She is famous among the eight prominent *sakhīs*. Her father was Śrī Pāvana Gopa and her mother was Devadānī Gopī.² This place, situated five miles south-east of Nandagaon, is where playful Kṛṣṇa applied *kajala* (*aṣjana*) to the eyes on His *prāṇa-vallabhā* Śrīmatī Rādhikā. This *līlā-sthalī* is therefore known as Āṣjanauka.

Once, Śrīmatī Rādhikā was sitting in a secluded *kuṣja* with Her *sakhīs*, who were dressing and decorating Her with various ornaments and jewels. The only thing left to be done was to apply *aṣjana* to Her eyes, when suddenly Kṛṣṇa played upon His sweet *varṁśī*. As soon as Śrīmatī Rādhikā heard that sound, She became overwhelmed and with great eagerness, left to meet Her *prāṇa-vallabha* without having applied *aṣjana*. Kṛṣṇa was also anxiously waiting to meet Her, and when She arrived, He sat Her on a flower-seat. He then put His hand around Her neck and His eager eyes drank Her beauty. However, when He noticed that there was no *aṣjana* on Her eyes, He asked the *sakhīs* why. They answered, “We had fully decorated Her except for the *aṣjana* but, as soon as She heard the sweet sound of Your *varṁśī*, She became so eager to meet with You that She immediately ran off. Although we repeatedly requested Her to wait so that we could apply *aṣjana*, we were unable to stop Her.” Hearing this filled Kṛṣṇa with *rasa*, and He applied *aṣjana* to Her eyes with His own hands. He then held up a mirror to let Rādhikā taste the beauty of Her form, which He also relished in the mirror.

Bhakti-ratnākara says:

*rasera āveśe kṛṣṇa aṣjana laīyā
dilena rādhikā netre mahā harṣa haīyā*

“Kṛṣṇa was absorbed in *rasa* and happily applied *aṣjana* to Rādhikā’s eyes.” Also situated here is a *rāsa-maṇḍala*, where *rāsa-līlā* took place. Kiśorī Kuṇḍa lies in the south of the village, and on the west bank of this *kuṇḍa* is the *aṣjanī śīlā* on which Śrī Kṛṣṇa seated Śrī Rādhā and decorated Her eyes with *aṣjana*.

Bijavārī

This village lies one and a half miles south-east of Nanda-gaon and one mile south of Khāyaro Gaon.

When Akrūra came to take the two brothers, Śrī Rāma and Kṛṣṇa to Mathurā, They ascended his chariot here. The *gopīs*, being so distressed from their impending separation from Kṛṣṇa, cried out, “O Prāṇanātha!” and fell to the ground unconscious. At that time, it appeared as if lightening bolts (*vidyutapuṣja*) were striking the ground. The corrupted form of the word *vidyutapuṣja* is *bijavārī*.

Akrūra left Bijavārī with the two brothers and travelling through Pisāi, Sahāra, Jainta and other villages, reached Akrūra Ghāṭa. There he took bath before finally reaching Mathurā. Akrūra-sthāna, where you can see Śrī Kṛṣṇa’s footprint on a rock, lies between Bijavārī and Nandagaon.

Parsom

While Śrī Kṛṣṇa sat on Akrūra’s chariot waiting to depart, He became disturbed upon seeing the condition of the *gopīs* in their mood of separation. To pacify them, He told them, “I promise that I will surely return the day after tomorrow.” The day after tomorrow is called *parsom* in Hindi, so the name of this village has become Parsom.

Parsom lies on the road between Govardhana and Varsānā, close to the village of Sī. The following verse from *Bhakti-ratnākara* describes how Kṛṣṇa repeatedly told the *gopīs* that He would return soon, and thereby indicates how Sī received its name:

*mathurā haīte śīghra karibe gamana
eī hetu śīghra sī, kahaye sarvajana*

The name Sī originates in the word *śīghra*, meaning ‘soon’.

Kāmaī

This is the birthplace of Viśākhā, one of the main *aṣṭa-sakhīs*. The village of Kāmaī lies five miles from Varsānā and four and a half miles south-west of Umrāo. South of Kāmaī are the villages of Sī and Parsom.

Karehlā

This is the birthplace of Lalitājī. The son of Karahālā Gopī, Govardhana Malla, would sometimes stay here with his wife Candrāvalī, and sometimes they would also stay in Sakhītharā (Sakhī-sthalī) near Govardhana. Candrāvalī’s father was Candrabhānu Gopa and her mother was Indūmatī Gopī. Candrāvalī is the cousin-sister of Śrīmatī Rādhikā. Vṛṣabhānu Mahārāja had four brothers – Candra-bhānu, Ratnabhānu, Subhānu and Śrībhānu. Vṛṣabhānu was the eldest. Since Śrīmatī Rādhikā is Vṛṣabhānu’s daughter, She and Candrāvalī are considered sisters. Padmā and other *yūtheśvarīs* stayed at this place, and would try to arrange meetings between Candrāvalī and Kṛṣṇa. Kaṅkaṇa Kuṇḍa, a *kadamba khaṇḍī*, a *jhūla* (swing), and the *baiṭhakas* of Śrī Vallabhācārya, Śrī Viṭṭhaleśa and Śrī Gokulanātha are located here. This place is situated one mile north of Kāmaī. On Bhādra Pūrṇimā, *rāsa-līlā* is staged here in the dramatic tradition of *būḍhī-līlā*.

Ludhaulī

This place lies half a mile west of Pīsāī Gaon. Here Lalitā arranged for Śrī Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa to meet. Both were eagerly hankering (*lubdha*) to meet each other, and so this place became known as Ludhaulī. Outside the village to the north is Lalitā Kuṇḍa, where Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa’s meeting took place. On the eastern bank of this *kuṇḍa*, one can take *darśana* of Lalitā-Bihārījī.

Pīsāī

Once, while herding the cows, Baladeva brought water here for Kṛṣṇa, who was feeling very thirsty. Hence, this village became known as Pyāsāī, meaning ‘thirst came’ (*pyās āī*). Tṛṣṇa Kuṇḍa and Viśākhā Kuṇḍa also lie here. Just near this village to the north-west is a beautiful *kadamba-khaṇḍī*. Pīsāī is situated one and a half miles north of Karehlā.

Sahāra

This is the residence of Nandajī’s eldest brother, Upānanda. He was extremely wise and in every respect Mahārāja Nanda’s guide and advisor. He

loved Nandanandana Śrī Kṛṣṇa more than his own life. Upānanda's son was Subhadra, whom Śrī Kṛṣṇa respected like His elder brother. Subhadra Sakhā, who was also very affectionate towards Kṛṣṇa, was expert in astrology and all other arts. He was always zealous to protect Kṛṣṇa from all types of hardships during cowherding. Subhadra's wife was Kundalatā, who accepted Kṛṣṇa as her very life. Very witty and playful, she loved to laugh. She was very expert in arranging meetings between Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. On the order of Yaśodā, she would bring Śrīmatī Rādhikā with her from Jāvaṭa to cook for Kṛṣṇa.

Sāṅkhī

This pastime-place lies one mile west of Narī and two miles north of Sahāra. It was here that Kṛṣṇa killed Śāṅkha-chūḍa, removed the jewel from his forehead, and gave it to Śrī Baladevajī.

One day, Kṛṣṇa and His *sakhās* were playing *raṅgīlī holī* with Rādhā and Her *sakhīs* near Rādhā Kuṇḍa at the foot of Govardhana. At that time, the demon Śāṅkhacūḍa caught the *gopīs* and fled. With *śāla* trees in Their hands, Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Baladeva ran after the demon to kill him. Seeing Their raging speed, Śāṅkhacūḍa left the *gopīs* and fled for his life. Kṛṣṇa left Dāū Bhaiyā to protect the *gopīs*, and pursued the demon alone, whom He killed. Kṛṣṇa then removed the jewel from Śāṅkhacūḍa's forehead and gave it to Baladeva, who sent it to Śrīmatī Rādhikā through Dhaniṣṭhā. Śrīmatī Rādhikā accepted the jewel with great honour.

Nearby is Rāma Kuṇḍa, which is also called Rāmatalā.

Chatravana (Chātā)

This place lies on the Mathurā-Delhī highway approximately twenty miles north-west of Mathurā and four miles south-west of Paya Gaon. Its present name is Chātā. In the north-east corner of this village lies Sūrya Kuṇḍa, and in its south-west is Candra Kuṇḍa, on whose bank Dāūjī Mandira is situated. Here, Śrīdāma and the other *sakhās* seated Śrī Kṛṣṇa on a throne and declared Him the exalted king (*chatra-patī*) of Braja. They thus performed a wonderful unprecedented *līlā* here. Śrī Balarāma sat on Kṛṣṇa's left side, and began executing the duties of minister of state. Śrīdāma held an umbrella (*chatra*) over Kṛṣṇa's head; Arjuna fanned Him with a *cāmara*; Madumaṅgala sat in front of Kṛṣṇa and acted as court jester; Subala offered Him *tāmbūla bīṭikā* (betel-nuts); and Subāhu, Viśāla and some other *sakhās* assumed the roles of subjects. Through Madumaṅgala, Chatra-patī Mahārāja Kṛṣṇa proclaimed throughout the land, "Mahārāja Chatra-patī Nandakumāra is the sole emperor here. No one else has claim to any authority. Daily the *gopīs* destroy this garden; therefore, they should all be punished." In memory of this *līlā*, this village is named Chatravana, or Chātā.

Umrāo

This village is situated approximately four or five miles east of Chatravana. When the *sakhīs* heard Śrī Kṛṣṇa's proclamation, they complained to Lalitā about Him. *Bhakti-ratnākara* describes what ensued:

*lalitādi sakhī krodhe kahe bāra bāra
rādhikā rājya ke karaye adhikāra
aiche kata kahi lalitādi sakhīgaṇa
rādhikāre umrāo kailā īkṣaṇa*

"Lalitā became angry and said, 'Who is that person who dares to claim authority over Rādhikā's kingdom? We will retaliate against Him.' Saying this, she sat Rādhikā on a beautiful throne and pronounced Her to be the undisputed *umrāva*, or queen." *Umrāo* means 'lord of a kingdom'.

Citrā Sakhī held an umbrella over Rādhikā's head, and Viśākhā fanned Her with a *cāmara*. Lalitājī sat on Rādhikā's left as Her minister of state. One *sakhī* offered Her *pān*, and the remaining *sakhīs* acted as subjects. Sitting on Her throne, Rādhikā ordered the *sakhīs*:

*mora rājya adhikāra kare yeī jana
parābhava kari tāre āna eī kṣaṇa*

(*Bhakti-ratnākara*)

"Go and defeat the person who desires to usurp My kingdom. Bind Him and bring Him before Me."

Receiving the order of their Umrāva, thousands and thousands of *sakhīs* with flower-sticks in their hands left for battle. When Arjuna, Lavaṅga, Bhṛṅga, Kokila, Subala and Madhumaṅgala saw them approaching, they fled in all directions. One clever *sakhī*, however, caught Madhumaṅgala, bound him with her flower garland, and brought him to the lotus-feet of the Umrāva. Some *gopīs* slapped Madhumaṅgala's cheeks a few times and said, "What audacity you have to try to unlawfully seize the authority of this kingdom from our Umrāva. We will punish you now." Madhumaṅgala bowed his head low like a defeated general and said, "That is befitting! We are defeated, but hand down such a punishment that my stomach will be filled." Hearing this, Mahārānī Rādhikā started laughing and said, "This is just some gluttonous *brāhmaṇa*. Release him." The *sakhīs* filled his stomach with *laḍḍūs* and let him go.

Madhumaṅgala returned to Chatra-pati Mahārāja Kṛṣṇa and, pretending to cry, gave Him a detailed report of his humiliating detention. Hearing this, Kṛṣṇa together with Madhumaṅgala and the *sakhīs* invaded Umrāo. When Śrīmatī Rādhikā saw Her *prāṇa-vallabha* Śrī Kṛṣṇa, She became very embarrassed and wanted to take off Her *umrāva* dress; but the *sakhīs*, laughing, would not let Her do so. Madhumaṅgala seated Chatra-pati Śrī Kṛṣṇa on Umrāva Rādhikā's right side. They both made a treaty in which Kṛṣṇa accepted Rādhikā's sovereignty. Madhumaṅgala folded his hands before Śrīmatī Rādhikā and said, "The kingdom of Kṛṣṇa's body is now under Your rule. You can take whatever You desire from Him." All the *sakhīs* and *sakhās* became very blissful participating in this pastime.

This village is called Umrāo after this *umrāva-līlā*, and is also known as Rādhā-sthalī. Afterwards Pūrṇamāsī enthroned Rādhikā here as Brajeśvarī, the Queen of Braja. There is also a Kiśorī Kuṇḍa here, where Śrī Lokanātha Gosvāmī performed *bhajana*. The worshipable deities of Lokanātha Gosvāmī, Śrī Rādhā-Vinoda, who appeared from this *kuṇḍa*, are now worshipped in Jaipura.

Dhanaśiṅga

This is the village of Dhaniṣṭhā Sakhī and lies near Umrāo. Dhaniṣṭhā Sakhī is a *kṛṣṇa-pakṣīya sakhī*, always engaged in various services in the home of Yaśodā. She especially performs the tasks of a *dūtī*, or messenger, and thus arranges for Kṛṣṇa to meet with Rādhikā.

Kosī (Kosīvana)

This place is situated on the Mathurā-Delhi highway about thirty-five miles from Mathurā and some ten miles from Chatravana. Here Śrī Kṛṣṇa arranged for Nanda Bābā to have *darśana* of Kuśasthalī (Dvārakā Dhāma) at Gomatī Kuṇḍa, situated west of the village.

Pretending ignorance and speaking in a taunting voice, Śrīmatī Rādhikā asked Kṛṣṇa, *Ko 'sī?* ("Who are You?"). This place is therefore called Kosī or Kosīvana.

Once, Śrī Kṛṣṇa was so eager to meet Śrīmatī Rādhikā that He knocked on Her door. From inside the house, Śrīmatī Rādhikā asked, "*Ko 'sī?*"

Śrī Kṛṣṇa replied, "I am Kṛṣṇa."

The word *kṛṣṇa* also happens to mean 'black snake'. Rādhikā therefore said, "If You are a black snake, then why do You need to be here? Do You want to bite Me? Go to the forest. You have no purpose here."

"No Priyatame! I am Ghanaśyāma."

Rādhikā took *ghanaśyāma* to mean 'black cloud'. "If You are a black cloud, then You are not needed here either," She answered. "Don't shower rain here and muddy My courtyard. Go to the forests and fields to discharge Your rain."

"Priyatame! I am Cakrī."

Cakrī also means 'potter'. Rādhikā therefore said, "There is no need for a *cakrī* here. No wedding festival is being held in My house. Take Your clay pots and go to where a marriage is being celebrated."

"Priyatame! I am Madhusūdana."

Rādhikā intentionally took the word *madhusūdana* to mean 'bumblebee' and said, "If You are *madhusūdana*, then quickly fly from here to a flower-garden and taste the *rasa* of the flowers. There is no flower-garden here."

"Are! I am Your beloved Hari," Kṛṣṇa insisted.

Rādhikā, taking *hari* to mean monkey or lion, laughingly replied, "What is the need of a monkey or a lion here? Do You want to scratch Me? You should quickly run away to a dense forest. We are all scared of lions and monkeys here."

Thus, Śrīmatī Rādhikā jokes with Her beloved Hari in various ways. May They be pleased with us. The pastime-place where this joking took place is called Kosīvana.

Raṇavāḍī

This village lies one mile north of Ārabāḍī and three miles south-west of Chātā. Nandanadana Śrī Kṛṣṇa is directly *manmatha-manmatha*, one who attracts even Cupid, and Śrīmatī Rādhikā is the direct manifestation of *mahābhāva*. Her function is to fulfil Kṛṣṇa's *kāma*, or desires. In Raṇa-vāḍī, they are both absorbed in varieties of love-play (*smara-yuddha*) aimed at pleasing each other. *Raṇavāḍī* means 'the place of amorous exchanges (*smara-vilāsa*) and playful games (*krīḍā-vilāsa*)'.

Around 150 years ago, a Bengali *bābā* named Kṛṣṇadāsa performed *bhajana* here. One day, an ardent desire to visit all the *tīrthas* of India awakened in his heart. Coincidentally, a *brāhmaṇa* was leaving from here to Dvārakā at that same time, and he insisted that Kṛṣṇadāsa Bābājī accompany him. Since Kṛṣṇadāsa already had this desire in his heart, he prepared himself for the journey. On the way, they took *darśana* of many *tīrthas* before finally arriving at Dvārakā Dhāma.

To enter Dvārakā, one had to be branded with a *cakra* on the skin (*taptamūdrā*), which Kṛṣṇadāsa Bābājī did. After visiting other *tīrthas*, he made his way back to Raṇavāḍī. However, to his surprise he discovered that he could no longer absorb his mind in *bhajana*. Despite great endeavour, he could not remember *aṣṭakālīya-līlā*, the eight-fold pastimes of the day. This caused him great distress, so he went to see his friend Siddha Kṛṣṇadāsa Bābājī at Rādhā Kuṇḍa. When Siddha Bābājī saw Kṛṣṇadāsa Bābājī, he turned his face away and said, "You have been deprived of Śrīmatī Rādhikā's mercy. You have left Her exclusive shelter and have taken the *taptamūdrā* of Dvārakā. This means that you have accepted the shelter of Śrī Rukmiṇī, Satyabhāmā and the other *mahiṣīs* (queens) of Dvārakā. It is therefore impossible for You to get Śrīmatī Rādhikā's mercy while you are in this body. Please leave this place at once, otherwise I will also be deprived of Her mercy."

Despondent, Kṛṣṇadāsa Bābājī returned to Raṇavāḍī. He closed the doors of his *bhajana-kuṭī* and refrained from water and food. His burning separation produced in his body a fire that exploded inside him, and within three days his material body had turned to ashes. After three days, the villagers broke open the door of his *bhajana-kuṭī*, and were astonished to find ashes instead of his body. On the Amāvasyā in the month of Pausa, the Brajabāsīs of that place annually celebrate the disappearance festival of this *bābājī* with great splendour.

Narīsemarī

The previous and correct name of this village is Kinnarī-Śyāmarī. In fact, it comprises two villages, namely Narī and Semarī, that border on each other

so closely that they are regarded as one. Semarī Gaon, the residence of the *yūtheśvarī* Śyāmalā Sakhī, lies four miles south-east of Chātā, and one mile south of Semarī is Narī Gaon.

Once, the *māna* of *māninī* Śrīmatī Rādhikā seemed unbreakable. Lalitā, Viśākhā and the other *sakhīs* tried their level best to pacify Her, but to no avail; instead Her *māna* simply increased. Finally, Kṛṣṇa, on the advice of the *sakhīs*, disguised Himself as Śyāmarī Sakhī and, playing the *vīṇā*, arrived at that place. Upon seeing the amazing beauty of Śyāmarī Sakhī and hearing her sing in various exquisite *rāgas* to the *vīṇā*'s full range of ascending and descending notes, Śrīmatī Rādhikā became enchanted. She asked, “*Sakhī*, what is your name? Where do you live?”

Kṛṣṇa, disguised as a *sakhī*, answered, “My name is Śyāmarī. I am a *kinnarī* from Svarga.” Śrīmatī Rādhikā became extremely overwhelmed upon hearing Śyāmarī Kinnarī play the *vīṇā* and sing in her very beautiful voice. Śrīmatī Rādhikā was just about to put Her jewelled necklace around the neck of Śyāmarī Kinnarī, when the *sakhī* folded her hands and made a request at Her lotus feet: “Please give me the jewel of Your *māna*.” When Śrīmatī Rādhikā heard this, She immediately understood that this was Her Priyatama asking Her to surrender Her precious sulky mood. Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa now happily reunited, and the *sakhīs* were overjoyed to have arranged this reconciliation.

Narīsemarī has taken its name from this sweet pastime: ‘Narī’ derives from the word *kinnarī*, and ‘Semarī’ from ‘Śyāmarī’. According to *Vṛndāvana-līlāmṛta*, the name Narī is a corrupted form of the word *hari*.

Another pastime also took place here. When Kṛṣṇa and Baladeva were about to leave for Mathurā, Akrūra seated Them on his chariot and quickly drove the chariot away. The *gopīs* stood watching with unblinking eyes as the chariot gradually disappeared from their vision and as the dust it had kicked up settled to the ground. Beside themselves with grief and agony, they fell to the ground calling out, “*Hā Hari! Hā Hari!*” To protect the memory of this *līlā*, Mahārāja Vajranābha established a village here known as Hari. Gradually, the word *hari* corrupted to become Narī. Kiśorī Kuṇḍa, Saṅkarṣaṇa Kuṇḍa and a *mandira* of Śrī Baladevajī are located in this village.

Khadiravana (Khāyaro)

The present name of this village is Khāyaro, and lies three miles south of Chātā and three miles south-east of Jāvaṭa. Kṛṣṇa would come to herd His cows here. Saṅgama Kuṇḍa, where a meeting (*saṅgama*) between the *gopīs* and Kṛṣṇa took place, is situated here. Lokanātha Gosvāmī performed *sādhana-bhajana* on the bank of this *kuṇḍa* in a solitary place. Occasionally, Bhūgarbha Gosvāmī would also come here and perform *bhajana* together with Lokanātha Gosvāmī. Nearby is a very charming *kadamba-khaṇḍī*. Kṛṣṇa, Balarāma and the *sakhās* performed many kinds of *bālya-līlās* (childhood pastimes) here. Every year when the dates (*khajūra*) ripened, Kṛṣṇa and the *sakhās* would come here to herd the cows and eat ripe dates.

Once, Bakāsura, a demon sent by Kāmsa, appeared here as a huge crane to swallow Kṛṣṇa. He opened wide his massive beak, his lower beak touching the ground, and his upper beak piercing the sky. He then ran at Kṛṣṇa with great speed to swallow Him. When all the *sakhās* saw this fearful form, they became filled with fright and began to shout, *Khāyo re! Khāyo re!* (“He will eat Kṛṣṇa! He will eat Kṛṣṇa!”). But Kṛṣṇa remained fearless. He put His foot on the lower beak, and catching the upper beak with His hand, split it just as one might split a straw. The *sakhās* joyfully cried out, *Khāyo re! Khāyo re!* (“Kṛṣṇa ate him! Kṛṣṇa ate him!”). The name of this village became Khāyāre because of this *līlā*. This place is also called Khadeḍavana or Khadīravana, because in order to kill Bakāsura, Kṛṣṇa had to chase him. The Hindi word for ‘to chase’ is *khadeḍnā*. Another reason why this forest is called Khadīravana is the *khadīra* trees growing here, the astringent extract of which is used for making *pān*.

Bakatharā

Situated near Jāvaṭa, this village lies between Khāyaro and Āśjanauka. It was here that Kṛṣṇa actually killed Bakāsura. This village is also called Cillī because Kṛṣṇa caught the beak of Bakāsura and split (*cīrnā*) it down the middle.

Neochāka

Kṛṣṇa and the *sakhās* used to eat their lunch here at midday when they were out tending the cows. Mother Yaśodā would send lunch for Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma, and the other mothers would do so for their own sons. Kṛṣṇa and His friends would then eat in a playful mood, making lots of jokes. The word *chāka* means ‘light meal’ or ‘food’, and *neochāka* means ‘to eat *chāka*’.

Bhaṇḍāgora

This place is situated two miles north-west of Raṇabāḍī, and currently goes by the name of Bhādāvalī. Śrī Nanda Mahārāja’s storeroom (*bhaṇḍāra gṛha*) was here. The cows were also brought here for grazing.

Khāmpura

This place lies one mile south of Bhādāvalī. Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa Yugala and the *sakhīs* ate various foodstuffs (*khāḍya*) here after playing *phāga*, or *holī*, in Raṇabāḍī.

Baiṭhāna (Baiṭhana)

Baḍī Baiṭhāna is situated two and a half miles north of Kokilāvana, and Choṭī Baiṭhāna is half a mile north of Baḍī Baiṭhāna. Thus, both villages lie near each other. Nanda Mahārāja, Upānanda, and all other older *gopas* would sit together here at a *baiṭhaka* and discuss the welfare of Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma.

Śrī Sanātana Gosvāmī would occasionally stay here for a few days at a time to perform *bhajana* and remember these *līlās*. The Brajabāsīs were charmed

by his affectionate be-haviour and would zealously request him to remain here for longer, which he would do.

South-east of Baḍī Baiṭhāna is Kṛṣṇa Kuṇḍa, which Kṛṣṇa holds very dear. He used to take bath and play here with the *sakhās*. In Choṭī Baiṭhāna is Kuntala Kuṇḍa, where the *sakhās* used to decorate Kṛṣṇa. In Baḍī Baiṭhāna is a temple of Dāūjī, and in Choṭī Baiṭhāna is a temple of Sākṣī Gopālajī.

Baḍokhora

The present name of this village is Baindokhara, but was previously called Baḍokhora. It is situated west of Baiṭhāna. Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa performed *krīḍā-vilāsa* here, behind the closed doors of a *kuṣja*. Caraṇagaṅgā and Caraṇa Pahāḍī are located here.

Caraṇa Pahāḍī

This place is located one mile north of Choṭī Baiṭhāna. It is called Caraṇa Pahāḍī because one can find Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Baladeva's footprints (*caraṇa cihna*) here, as well as imprints made by cows and *gopas*.

Once, while herding the cows, Kṛṣṇa reached this place with His entourage of *sakhās*. The cows were grazing some distance from where He stood, and the *sakhās* were also a short distance away. In a playful mood, Kṛṣṇa stood under a tree on top of Caraṇa Pahāḍī in His *tribhaṅga-lalita* form. He played such a melody on His *vanśī* that the entire hill melted upon hearing the sound. What to speak of the cowherd boys and cows, even the deer, does and other animals and birds were allured. They quickly made their way to Kṛṣṇa, leaving imprints across the melted stones. These imprints all point in one direction only, because when Kṛṣṇa stopped playing His flute, the stones regained their natural state, which meant the *gopīs*, *gopas* and animals left no impressions behind when they went their different ways.

Bhakti-ratnākara affirms:

*śrī-kṛṣṇera pāda-padma-cihna e rahila
eī hetu caraṇa pahāḍī nāma haīla*

"This place is named Caraṇa Pahāḍī because Śrī Kṛṣṇa's foot-prints are on top of the mountain." The word *caraṇa* means 'foot', and *pahāḍī* means 'mountain'.

Nearby is Caraṇagaṅgā, where Kṛṣṇa washed His feet.

Rasaulī

This village lies between Caraṇa Pahāḍī and Koṭvana. Kṛṣṇa and the *gopīs*' famous *śārādīya rāsa-līlā* took place here.

Kāmara

Once, Śrī Kṛṣṇa was beside Himself with the desire to meet with Śrīmatī Rādhikā. In great restlessness, He gazed down the path along which He hoped She might appear. Finally, He called Her name on His flute. Śrīmatī Rādhikā and the *sakhīs* were very attracted by that sound and they made

their way to Kṛṣṇa, who was overjoyed. The *gopīs* then thought to play a trick on Kṛṣṇa. They very quietly picked up their beloved's black blanket (*kāṛī kāmara*) and hid it. Śrī Kṛṣṇa then began to search for His dear blanket. The *bhakta* poet Śrī Sūradāsajī has briefly described this pastime with much *rasa*. In this poem, Kanhaiyā is complaining to Maiyā:

*maiya merī kāmara cor lai
maiñ ban jāt carāvan gaiyā sūnī dekh lai
ek kahe kānhā terī kāmara jamunā jāt bahī
ek kahe kānhā terī kāmara surbhī khāy gai
ek kahe nāco mere āge lai dehuñ ju nai
sūrdāsa jasumati ke āge ānsuvan dhār bahī*

“Maiyā! I went to the forest to graze the cows. They had wandered far away, so I put down My blanket and went after them. But while I was gone some *sakhī* secretly stole My blanket. When I returned and could not find it, I asked the *sakhīs*, ‘Where is My blanket? If you have taken it, then return it.’ One *sakhī* said, ‘Kanhaiyā! Your blanket fell in the Yamunā and is floating downstream. I saw it myself.’ Another *sakhī* said, ‘Kanhaiyā! I saw a cow eating Your blanket.’ Maiyā! Tell Me, how could a kind-hearted cow eat My blanket? Another *sakhī* said, ‘Kanhaiyā! If You dance in front of me, then I will give You a new blanket.’ Maiyā! These *sakhīs* are teasing Me in many ways.” Saying this, Kanhaiyā’s eyes filled with tears. Maiyā lifted up her *lālā* and put Him to her breast.”

This village is called Kāmara because Kṛṣṇa was completely immersed in *kāma* (*prema*) here, as He eagerly waited for Śrīmatī Rādhikā. It is also named Kāmara because it was here that Kṛṣṇa complained about the *gopīs* stealing His *kāmara*, or black blanket. One is recommended to take *darśana* of Gopī Kuṇḍa, Gopī Jalvihāra, Hari Kuṇḍa, Mohana Kuṇḍa, and the *mandiras* of Mohanajī and Durvāsājī in this area.

Bāsosi

This village is situated two miles north of Śeṣaśāī. Here, the bees became intoxicated upon smelling the beautiful fra-grance of Śrī Kṛṣṇa’s limbs and hummed all around Him. The word *bāsa* means ‘fragrance’ and thus the name of this place became Bāsosi. Here Rādhā, Kṛṣṇa and the *sakhīs* became intoxicated in *krīḍā-vilāsa*. The fragrance of Their limbs pervaded the air just as *abīra*, *gulāla* and *candana* fill the air during the *holī* festival.

Paya Gaon

This village lies six miles east of Kosī. Although the mothers of Kṛṣṇa, Balarāma and the *gopas* would send lunch for them, one day, their lunches arrived late. In hunger, Śrī Kṛṣṇa and the *sakhās* went to this village and drank milk (*paya*). This village has therefore become known as Paya Gaon. North of Paya Gaon is Paya Sarovara, as well as a grove beautifully decorated with *tamāla* and *kadamba* trees.

Koṭvāna

This place is situated near the Delhi-Mathurā highway in between Kosī and Hoḍal. It is four miles north and a little east of Caraṇa Pahāḍī. It used to be called Koṭarvana. One can take darśana of Śītala Kuṇḍa and Sūrya Kuṇḍa here. Kṛṣṇa used to herd the cows and perform *kṛīḍā-vilāsa* here.

Śeṣaśāī

This pastime-place lies one and a half miles south and somewhat east of Bāsolī. Nearby is Kṣīrasāgara Grāma. In a *mandira* on the west bank of Kṣīrasāgara is a deity of Bhagavān Ananta reclining on His bed with Lakṣmīṇī massaging His lotus feet (*śayana-līlā*).

One time, when the playful Kṛṣṇa was engaged in *vilāsa* here with Śrīmatī Rādhikā and the *sakhīs*, the *kathā* of Bhagavān Anantaśāyī Viṣṇu somehow came up in their conversation. A strong desire to see the *śayana-līlā* of Anantaśāyī Viṣṇu arose in Śrīmatī Rādhikā's heart, so Kṛṣṇa gave Her *darśana* of this *līlā*. Immersed in the *bhāva* of Anantaśāyī, Śrī Kṛṣṇa laid down on a thousand-petalled lotus in the middle of Kṣīrasāgara, and Śrīmatī Rādhikā, in the mood of Lakṣmī, massaged His lotus feet. All the assembled *gopīs* became quite astonished. Śrīla Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī alludes to this *līlā* in his *Vraja-vilāsa stava* (śloka 91):

*yasya śrīmac-caraṇa-kamale komale komalāpi
śrī-rādhocair nija-sukha-kṛte sannayantī kucāgre
bhītā py ārādatha na hi dadhātay asya kārkaśaya-doṣāta
sa śrī-goṣṭhe prathayatu sadā śeṣaśāyī sthitiṁ naḥ*

“Even though Śrīmatī Rādhikā has extremely soft limbs, when She brought Śrī Kṛṣṇa's very soft and charming lotus feet near Her chest, She could not bring Herself to place them on it as She feared that the touch of Her hard breasts might cause Him pain. May I obtain residence in the enchanting *goṣṭha* (Braja) of Śeṣaśāyī Kṛṣṇa.”

When Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu travelled throughout Braja, He came to take *darśana* of this place, and in doing so became filled with *prema*. There is a charming *kadamba* forest here, and one can also take *darśana* of Prauḍhanātha and a *hiṇḍola*, swing. Nearby is a *baiṭhaka*, or sitting-place, of Śrī Vallabhācārya.

Khāmī Gaon (Khambahara)

This village is situated on the border of Braja. To establish the boundary of Braja, Śrī Vajranābha Mahārāja construct-ed a stone pillar (*khambā*) here. Vanacarī Gaon is nearby. These two villages are situated on the north-west border of Braja, four miles north-east of Hoḍal. Here, one can have *darśana* of Lakṣmī-Nārāyaṇa and Mahādevajī.

Khayero (Kharero)

This place lies four miles south, and a little east, of Śeṣaśāī. When Baladevajī came here from Dvārakāpurī, He asked the *sakhās* for *khaira*, or good news. This place is also a pasturing-ground for the cows.

Banachaulī

This village lies two and a half miles east of Kharero and four miles north-west of Paya Gaon. Kṛṣṇa performed *rāsa-līlā* here.

Ūjānī

This place is situated four miles north-east of Paya Gaon and is near the main road between Chātā and Śergarh. The word *ūjānī* means ‘opposite flow’. The Yamunā started flowing upstream here upon hearing the very sweet sound of Śrī Kṛṣṇa’s flute. One can still have *darśana* of this place today.

Khelanvana (Śergarh)

This place lies two miles south-east of Ūjānī. Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Śrī Balarāma used to amuse themselves here with the *sakhās* when they would come for cowherding. Śrīmatī Rādhikā also played here with Her *sakhīs*. This place is called Khelan-vana because they would play (*khelnā*) here.

Nanda Bābā resided here for some time with the *gopīs*, *gopas* and cows. Vṛṣabhānu Bābā also stayed here with his whole family and herd of cows.

Jaṭilā and Koṭilā thought themselves to be the only chaste women in Braja, and they considered Rādhikā to be not even slightly chaste. They always spoke ill of Rādhikā and made propaganda against Her. Kṛṣṇa was aware of all this. One day, He pretended to be ill to the point of death. Yaśodājī called all the *vaidyas* (Ayurvedic doctors) and *brāhmaṇas* skilled in *mantras*, but no one was able to help. Finally, Yogamāyā Pūrṇimājī arrived on the scene. She said, “If a chaste lady brings water from the Yamunā in this earthen water-pot, which has hundreds of holes, and if I then perform *abhiṣeka* of Kṛṣṇa with *mantras* and with that water, then Kanhaiyā can become healthy. Otherwise, it will be impossible to save Him.” Yaśodājī called Jaṭilā and Kuṭilā and requested them to bring water from the Yamunā in that special pot. They went separately to the Yamunā to fill the pot, but were unable to retain even a drop of water in it. Embarrassed, they left the pot on the Yamunā’s shore and returned home by another path so as not to meet anyone.

Yogamāyā Pūrṇimājī then advised Yaśodā Maiyā to request Śrīmatī Rādhikā to bring water in that hundred-holed pot. Upon being repeatedly requested, Śrīmatī Rādhikā finally agreed to go to the Yamunā. She successfully brought back water in that pot without spilling even one drop. Pūrṇamāsījī sprinkled Kṛṣṇa with that water, and He immediately regained His health. All the Brajabāsīs were amazed to see this wonderful incident, and Rādhikā’s chastity was praised everywhere.

Places of *darśana* here are Balarāma Kuṇḍa, Gopī Ghāṭa, Śrī Rādhā-Govindajī, Śrī Rādhā-Gopināthajī and Śrī Rādhā-Madana Mohana.

Rāma Ghāṭa

This place lies on the bank of Yamunā, two miles east of Śergarh. Its present name is Obe. Baladevajī performed *rāsa-līlā* here.

Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma had been living in Dvārakā for a long time. The Brajabāsīs' distress, caused by their separation from Them, was so great that Śrī Kṛṣṇa sent Śrī Baladeva to Braja to console them. At that time Nanda-Gokula was nearby. Baladevajī spent the two months of Caitra and Vaiśākha in Nanda-Braja, and tried His utmost to console His parents, the *sakhās* and the *gopīs*.³ In the end, to alleviate the agony of the *gopīs*' separation, Baladevajī performed *rāsa* here, complete with dancing and singing.

At that time, Varuṇadeva induced highly fragrant *vāruṇī*, a sweet nectar found in trees, to start flowing. Baladevajī and His beloveds drank this *vāruṇī* and, becoming intoxicated, submerged in *rāsa-vilāsa*. To perform *jal-kṛīḍā* and to quench the thirst of *gopīs*, He called Yamunājī, who was flowing some distance away. When she did not come, however, He dragged her over to them with His plough. He and the *gopīs* then played *jal-vihāra* and other games (*kṛīḍā*) in the Yamunā. Even today, the Yamunā leaves her natural course and flows by Rāma Ghāṭa.

A doubt may arise as to how Baladevajī could perform *rāsa* with Śrī Kṛṣṇa's beloved *gopīs*. This would be wholly im-proper from the perspective of *rasa*. It also seems improper for Baladevajī to have dragged the Yamunā with His plough, since she is a manifestation of Viśākhā, and therefore the beloved of Kṛṣṇa. Such doubts, however, arise only in the minds of those who lack *tattva-jñāna*. Ordinary people cannot understand transcendental *rāsa-tattva*. Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma's *rāsa* does not contain even the slightest trace of material licentiousness or desire for lusty enjoyment. Furthermore, Baladevajī performed *rāsa* only with His own group of *braja-yuvatīs*. This is clear from Śrī Murāri Gupta's *Śrī Kṛṣṇa Caitanya Carita*.⁴ Yamunājī is Viśākhā herself. She is a beloved of Kṛṣṇa and one of the main girlfriends of Śrīmatī Rādhikā. The Yamunā that flows into the sea, however, is a manifestation of this Yamunā. It was this manifestation, not Yamunā herself, the beloved of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, who Baladevajī dragged with the nose of His plough. One can dispel one's doubt on this subject in this way.

Śrī Nityānanda Prabhu came here during His tour of Braja-maṇḍala, and when He took *darśana* of this place, He became absorbed in *bhāva*. Near the *mandira* of Balarāmajī is an *aśvattha* tree, which is known to be a *sakhā* of Balarāma. Balarāma's *rāsa-līlā* took place here.

Brahma Ghāṭa

Near Rāma Ghāṭa lies the extremely enchanting Brahma Ghāṭa, where Brahmājī worshipped Śrī Kṛṣṇa to beg for-giveness for stealing the calves.

Kacchavana

This place is near Rāma Ghāṭa. Here, Kṛṣṇa and the *sakhās* played as if they were tortoises (*kachuā*).

Bhūṣaṇavana

This place is situated near Kacchavana. While they grazed their cows, the *sakhās* decorated (*bhūṣita kiyā*) Kṛṣṇa here with various kinds of flowers. This place is therefore called Bhūṣaṇavana.

Guṣjāvana

Nearby Bhūṣaṇavana is Guṣjāvana where the *gopīs* decorated Kṛṣṇa in a wonderful way with a *guṣjā-mālā*, and Kṛṣṇa did the same to Śrīmatī Rādhikā.

Bihāravana

This place lies one and a half miles south-west of Rāma Ghāṭa. *Darśana* of Bihārījī Mandira and Bihāra Kuṇḍa is recommended. *Braja-bihārī* Kṛṣṇa together with Rādhikā and the *gopīs* performed *rāsa-vihāra* and other kinds of *krīḍā-vilāsa* at this charming place near Śrī Yamunā. Although most of the forests of Braja have been cut down, Bihāravana remains somewhat protected. Even today, cuckoos sing and thousands of peacocks make their *ke-kā* sound here, and during the rainy season they dance and drop their feathers. There are many beautiful *kuṣjas*, *kadamba-khaṇḍīs* and many kinds of creepers here. When one takes *darśana* of this place, sweet remembrances of Kṛṣṇa's *līlās* will manifest in one's heart. In the *gośālā* here, the very beautiful cows, jumping calves and intoxicated looking bulls awaken sweet memories of Śrī Kṛṣṇa's cow-grazing pastimes.

Akṣayaṇa

This place is also called Bhāṇḍīraṇa, and is situated two miles south of Rāma Ghāṭa. Śrī Kṛṣṇa, Balarāma and the *sakhās* played many games in the shade of this *vaṭa* tree. They especially liked to wrestle here. This is the place where Baladeva killed Pralambāsura.

Once during cowherding, Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma left the cows to graze in the lush, green fields and went off to play with the *sakhās*. They divided themselves into two groups, one headed by Kṛṣṇa and the other headed by Baladeva. The game they played had a rule that each boy in the group that lost had to carry the boy who had defeated him on his shoulders from Bhāṇḍīraṇa to a fixed place some distance away and then back again. Pralambāsura, a demon sent by Kāṁsa, assumed the form of a beautiful *sakhā* and joined Kṛṣṇa's team. Kṛṣṇa knowingly encouraged the new *sakhā* to play and kept him on His team. Śrī Kṛṣṇa was defeated by Śrīdāma and Pralambāsura by Balarāma. According to the rules, Śrīdāma sat on Śrī Kṛṣṇa's shoulders and Balarāma on Pralambāsura's. Kṛṣṇa made his way towards the appointed place, but the wicked Pralambāsura ran instead to a place that was deep and isolated and, after some time, assumed his hideous *rākṣasa* form. Kāṁsa had instructed him to kill Baladevajī before killing Kṛṣṇa. At first, Baladeva Prabhu was uncertain about what to do but, upon

receiving a clue from Kṛṣṇa, He split the head of the demon with a blow of His fist. Pralambāsura vomited blood and collapsed to the earth. When Kṛṣṇa and the *sakhās* arrived there, they embraced Balarāma and praised His strength and fortitude.

The following pastime also took place at Akṣayaṇa. One day, Śrīmatī Rādhikā, the *sakhās* and Śrī Kṛṣṇa were doing *līlā-vilāsa* here. The *sakhās* said to Kṛṣṇa, “Prāṇa-vallabha! You always boast that You have defeated even experts wrestlers. But why is it that Śrīdāma defeated You?”

Śrī Kṛṣṇa answered, “That is entirely untrue. No one in the whole universe can defeat Me. I have never been defeat-ed by Śrīdāma.”

Hearing this, Rādhikājī replied, “If that is so, then we *gopīs* are ready to wrestle with You. If You defeat us, then we will understand that You are the topmost wrestler.” The *gopīs* then dressed themselves as wrestlers and Śrīmatī Rādhikā wrestled with Kṛṣṇa, easily defeating Him. The *sakhās* clapped their hands and praised Her.

Since Śrī Kṛṣṇa and the *sakhās* wrestled and performed physical exercise here, this village near Akṣayaṇa is called Kāśraṭa. The word *kāśraṭa* means *kasrat karnā*, or ‘to perform physical exercise’. It also means *kuśṭī karnā*, or ‘to wrestle’. When the ancient *vaṭa* tree that stood here disappeared, a new one was planted in its place. Note that Bhāṇḍīraṇa situated in Bhāṇḍīravana is a different pastime-place that lies on the other bank of the Yamunā.

Āgiyārā Gaon (Ārā)

This village is situated two miles south-west of the village of Kāśraṭa. It is located in the middle of Muṣjāṭavī, where Kṛṣṇa used to take the cows to pasture.

Once, Kṛṣṇa was playing with the *sakhās* in the shade of Bhāṇḍīraṇa. Nearby, the cows drank water from the Yamunā and began to graze on the lush, green grass in the fields. In doing so, they gradually wandered off to Muṣjāṭavī some distance away. It was a summer day, and the scorching heat was drying up the *muṣja* plants and baking the sand on the ground. The cows had wandered off without Kṛṣṇa, and they now entered this *muṣja* forest, which was devoid of water and shade. This Muṣjāṭavī was so dense that they lost track of the path by which they had come. Overwhelmed with thirst and heat, the cows became restless.

In their search for the cows, the *sakhās* had also left Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma and, entering Muṣjāṭavī, they too became agitated by thirst and heat. It was then that the followers of the wicked Kamsa set Muṣjavana on fire. Within a moment, the wind had spread the fire everywhere, so that it surrounded the cows and the cowherd boys. Seeing no other means of escape, they began to cry out to Kṛṣṇa and Baladeva who heard their call and immediately went to them. “Close your eyes for just a moment,” Kṛṣṇa told them, and in that moment He swallowed the terrible forest fire. Upon opening their eyes, the *sakhās* saw that they were now standing with Kṛṣṇa and Baladeva in the

cooling shade of Bhāṇḍīravata, the cows peacefully lying nearby chewing their cud. The *jīva* suffering in the forest fire of material existence can similarly be easily delivered from this suffer-ing simply by taking shelter of Kṛṣṇa.

Another name for Muṣjāṭavī is Īśikāṭavī. On the other side of the Yamunā is the village of Bhāṇḍīra, which is also the location of Muṣjāṭavī.

Tapovana

This place is situated east of Akṣayavaṭa, one mile from the bank of the Yamunā. Here, the young *gopīs* prayed for the fulfillment of their desire, which was to have Śrī Kṛṣṇa as their husband. It is said that in their previous birth, these *gopīs* were the sages in the forest of Daṇḍakāraṇya who were absorbed in austerities with the desire to attain Śrī Kṛṣṇa. By the mercy of Śrī Rāmacandrajī, they took birth from the womb of *gopīs* in Dvāpara-yuga. The princesses of Janaka-pura are also counted in this group. Like Sītā, they had wanted to marry Śrī Rāmacandrajī, and therefore, by the mercy of Śrī Rāmacandrajī, they took birth as *gopīs* in Braja at the end of Dvāpara-yuga. This Tapovana is where these young *gopīs* performed *ārādhana* to attain Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

Śrī Lalitā, Viśākhā and other *nitya-siddha gopīs* are *kāya-vyūha* expansions (direct bodily expansions) of *antaraṅga-svarūpa-śakti* Śrīmatī Rādhikā; therefore, there is no need for them to perform any *tapasya*.

Gopī Ghāṭa

This place is called Gopī Ghāṭa because here the above mentioned *gopīs* used to bathe in the Yamunā.

Cīra Ghāṭa

This pastime-place lies two miles west of Akṣayavaṭa. The young *gopīs* had worshipped Kātyāyanī-devī regularly for one month, observing all vows to attain Śrī Kṛṣṇa as their husband.⁵ At the end of their *vrata*, Śrī Kṛṣṇa, along with some *priya-narma sakhās* stole the *gopīs'* clothes and gave them the benediction that their desire would be fulfilled. The *mandira* of Kātyāyanī-devī is situated here on the bank of the Yamunā. The present name of this village is Siyāro.

Nanda Ghāṭa

This place is situated two miles south of Gopī Ghāṭa and one mile south-east of Akṣayavaṭa.

Once, Mahārāja Nanda performed an Ekādaśī-vrata and took his bath here on Dvādaśī night. This was an inaus-picious time to take bath, and therefore the servants of Varuṇa captured him and brought him before their master. News of Mahārāja Nanda's disappearance in the Yamunā so distressed the Brajabāsīs that, upon seeing their crying, Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Balarāmajī went to Varuṇaloka to look for him. When Varuṇadeva saw Kṛṣṇa before him, he

offered *stava-stutis* and presented Him with gifts of various ornaments made of pearls, jewels and precious stones. He begged Kṛṣṇa to forgive him for arresting Nanda Bābā. When Śrī Kṛṣṇa returned with His father, they met again with the Brajabāsīs at this place. Many years later, the following pastime also occurred here.

Once, in a discussion on *śāstra*, Jīva Gosvāmī defeated a *digvijayī paṇḍita*, a scholar who is victorious in debate all over the world. This *digvijayī paṇḍita* had wanted to edit the writings of Śrī Rūpa Gosvāmī, but the young Jīva Gosvāmī was unable to tolerate this and defeated him at the Yamunā in Vṛndāvana. The scholar then approached Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī to find out who this boy was, greatly praising the boy's erudition. With great humility, Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī said, "He is my brother's son as well as my disciple." Understanding that Jīva had debated with the *digvijayī paṇḍita*, Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī addressed Jīva as soon as the *paṇḍita* had gone: "Jīva! Could you not even tolerate an event as insignificant as this? Since you desire prestige, please leave this place at once."

Dejected upon hearing the harsh disciplinary words of Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī, Jīva Gosvāmī left Vṛndāvana for Nanda Ghāṭa where, on the bank of the Yamunā, in a dense and desolate forest, he lived in a crocodile hole. He maintained his life here somehow or other with great difficulty. Feeling intense separation from his Gurudeva, sometimes he would drink flour mixed with water, and sometimes he would just fast. His body gradually dried up and became very thin. At that time, on the pretext of performing *parikramā* of Braja, Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī came to Nanda Ghāṭa where he heard from the mouths of the Brajabāsīs the abundant glories of the young Gauḍīya *sādhū* and his severe austerities. He went to Jīva Gosvāmī, consoled him, and took him back to Vṛndāvana. Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī then went alone to meet with Rūpa Gosvāmī, leaving Jīva in his *bhajana-kuṭī*. At that time, Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī was speaking to a group of Vaiṣṇavas about bestowing mercy upon the *jīvas*. Midway through this discussion, Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī said, "You are instructing others to show mercy to the *jīvas*, but why aren't you showing mercy to Jīva himself?" Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī understood the hidden meaning behind the puzzling words of his elder brother and Guru, and called for Śrī Jīva. He saw to it that Jīva received medical care and engaged him in his service once again. It was while he was living in Nanda Ghāṭa that Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī composed his famous work known as the *Ṣaḍ-sandarbhās*. Even today, the place where Jīva Gosvāmī lived is known as Jīva Gosvāmī's cave.

Bhaiyā (Bhaya Gaon)

Seeing the servants of Varuṇa, Śrī Nanda Mahārāja became fearful (*bhaya-bhīta*). In memory of this, Vajranābha named this village Bhaya Gaon. This village lies close to Nanda Ghāṭa.

Gāṅgralī

This place is situated two miles south and slightly east of Cīra Ghāṭa. It also lies two miles north of Bhaya Gaon.

Basaī Gaon (Vatsavana)

This place lies four miles south-west of Nanda Ghāṭa. It was here that Brahmājī stole the cows and cowherd boys and therefore this place is known as Vatsavana or Bacchavana. The names of this place derive from the words *vatsa* and *bachḍā*, which both mean ‘calf’. The present name of the village is Basaī Gaon. Places of *darśana* here are the *mandira* of Śrī Vatsa-Vihārījī, the place of Gvāla Maṇḍalījī, Gvāla Kuṇḍa, Haribol Tīrtha and Śrī Vallabhācārya’s *baiṭhaka*.

Once, Śrī Kṛṣṇa and the cowherd boys were herding the calves on the bank of the Yamunā. While grazing, the calves wandered to this forest while Kṛṣṇa and the *sakhās* played all kinds of games in the soft sand of the Yamunā. Caturmukha Brahmā had been astonished to see Aghāsura enter Kṛṣṇa’s lotus feet and become liberated. In order to see more of Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa’s sweet pastimes, he stole the calves when they entered this forest and hid them in a cave.

Kṛṣṇa and the cowherd boys became filled with anxiety upon noticing that the calves were nowhere to be seen. Leaving the *sakhās* there, Kṛṣṇa went out alone to search for the calves but, unable to find them, He returned to the bank of the Yamunā where He had left his *sakhās*. In Kṛṣṇa’s absence, Brahmājī had also hidden away the *sakhās*. Śrī Kṛṣṇa is *sarva-śaktimāna* and the possessor of the six opulences, and He therefore understood Brahmā’s actions. Personally assuming forms identical to His calves and cowherd boys, including their sticks, clothes, flutes, horns and so forth, He continued His pastime as before. This went on for one year. Even Baladeva could not understand the mystery of what had occurred. Finally, after one year, Baladeva, who had observed some extraordinary occurrence, was able to understand that Kṛṣṇa had expanded Himself as the cows and cowherd boys and was playing out a *līlā*. At that same time, Brahmā was amazed to see that the same calves and cowherd boys that he had put to sleep in a cave were now performing pastimes with Kṛṣṇa just like before. He was completely astonished. Śrī Kṛṣṇa then removed Yogamāyā’s curtain of bewilderment. When Brahmājī realized the *bhagavattā*, or supreme godliness, of Śrī Kṛṣṇa and saw His astounding activities, he offered prostrated obeisances at His lotus feet and began to recite *stava* and *stutis*.⁶ Brahmā prayed to take birth in Braja-Gokula and to bathe in its dust.

Unāī (Janāī Gaon)

This place lies one and a half miles south of Bājanā. This was the spot where Brahmā became bewildered upon seeing Kṛṣṇa sitting and eating with his *sakhās*. In the end, Kṛṣṇa kindly removed Brahmā’s bewilderment and revealed Himself to him. At that time, Brahmā saw the whole universe as *kṛṣṇamaya*, or filled with Kṛṣṇa. Therefore, this place is called Janāī Gaon, which derives from the verb *jānnā* meaning ‘to know’ or ‘to understand’.

Bālahārā

It was here that Brahmā stole away the cowherd boys. This place is therefore called Bālahārā. *Bāla* means ‘boy’, and *harnā* means ‘to steal’.

Parkhama

This place is situated one mile west of Janāī Gaon. Seeing Kṛṣṇa and the *sakhās* sitting and eating together, Brahmājī wanted to test His *bhagavattā*. This place is therefore known as Parkhama, from the verb *parīkṣā karnā*, meaning ‘to test’.

Seī

This place is situated one and a half miles south-east of Parkhama and four miles from Pasaulī. Brahmājī, bewildered by Kṛṣṇa’s *māyā*, stole the cowherd boys and the calves and hid them in a secret place. However, when he returned after one year, he saw that Kṛṣṇa and the cowherd boys were tending the calves just as before. At that time, he began to wonder if the cowherd boys and calves that he had hidden in the cave were still there (*seī*). When he saw that they were indeed still there, he doubted that they were with Kṛṣṇa. *Kyā seī?* (“Are they there?”), he wondered. By Brahmājī’s saying *seī* over and over again in this way, this place became known as Seī. Seeing the cowherd boys and the calves together with Kṛṣṇa as before, Brahmājī ascertained (*seī*), “This Kṛṣṇa is definitely Svayaṁ Bhagavān.”

Caumā

Being fearful, Brahmājī repented and praised Śrī Kṛṣṇa with his four mouths (*cār mūkhā*) at this place; therefore, this village is called Caumuñhā. It lies on the Mathurā-Delhi highway one mile west of Parkhama and approximately eight miles from Mathurā. One mile from Caumuñhā is a very beautiful village named Ajhaī, where one can have *darśana* of an ancient deity of Brahmājī. Today, Caumuñhā is simply known as Caumā. *Bhakti-ratnākara* affirms:

*caumuñhā grāme brahmā āṁsi kṛṣṇapāśe
karaye kṛṣṇa stuti aśeṣa viśeṣe*

“Brahmā offered prayers to Kṛṣṇa in Caumuñhā Grāma.”

Pasaulī

This place is also called Sapaulī, Aghavana and Sarpasthalī. Here, Śrī Kṛṣṇa killed and delivered Aghāsura, who had assumed the form of a python. Pasaulī lies two miles north-west of Parkhama.

Once, Kṛṣṇa and the cowherd boys came to this forest while grazing the cows. Aghāsura, the embodiment of *agha*, or sin, also came here intent on avenging his sister Pūtanā’s death. Taking the form of an enormous and fearsome python, he lay on the road, his lower jaw on the ground and his upper jaw touching the sky. His mouth looked like a cave and his tongue like the road entering it. The cowherd boys and the calves casually entered his mouth, but he did not close his mouth because he was specifically intent on

swallowing Kṛṣṇa. However Kṛṣṇa remained behind. From a distance, He had signalled to the cowherd boys to not enter Agha's mouth, but they had fearlessly entered nonetheless, having not the slightest doubt about Śrī Kṛṣṇa's power to protect them. To rescue the *sakhās*, Śrī Kṛṣṇa now also entered Agha's mouth, which thereupon closed. Śrī Kṛṣṇa became an obstacle in Agha's throat by expanding His body so much that Agha's breathing stopped and he choked. The demon thus suffocated. Within a short time, the opening at the top of his skull burst open and a light came out and ascended into the sky.

Śrī Kṛṣṇa then glanced over the cowherd boys and calves, bringing them back to life. They all emerged from Aghāsura's mouth. Brahmājī and other demigods saw the light enter Kṛṣṇa's lotus feet. After Kṛṣṇa delivered Aghāsura, He returned with the cowherd boys to Vṛndāvana.

Jainta

After the killing of Aghāsura, the sound of the demigods calling out, "Let there be all victory to Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa! All victory!" reverberated throughout the sky and the nearby forest area. In great joy, the cowherd boys joined in, and the tumultuous sound of "All victory! All victory!" filled the sky.⁷

This place is known as Jainta because it carries the memory of Śrī Kṛṣṇa's victory over Aghāsura. *Jaya* means 'victory'. There is a pond here with a *mūrti* of a snake constructed in such a way that it is always visible above the water, no matter how high the water is in the pond. This place is situated three miles from Chaṭṭikarā.

Seyāno

The present name of this place is Sihonā. Upon receiving the news of Aghāsura's death, the old *gopas* and *gopīs* glorified Kṛṣṇa again and again saying, *Kṛṣṇa seyāno hoyā gayo hai, seyāno hoyā gayo hai* ("Kṛṣṇa is so clever! He is so clever!"). *Seyāno* means 'clever' or 'strong', and thus Mahārāja Vajranābha named this place Seyāno Gaon. This place lies two miles from Ajhāī. One can have *darśana* here of a deity of the four Kumāras – Sanaka, Sanandana, Sanata and Sanātana.

Taraulī

This village is situated two miles north-west of Basolī, one mile east and a little north of Śyāmarī Gaon, and one mile east of Baraulī.

Baraulī

The villages of Taraulī and Baraulī lie side by side. They are both places of Kṛṣṇa's pastimes. Pīṭhara Gaon lies on the road leaving from Baraulī.

Tamālavana and Kṛṣṇa Kuṇḍa Tīlā

Surrounded by a dense forest of *tamāla* trees, this is a place where Śrī Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa met and became immersed in nectar-filled loving pastimes. One time, *rasika-bihārī* Śrī Kṛṣṇa met with Rādhājī and the *sakhīs* in this *tamāla kuṣja*. Many kinds of creepers and vines had wound themselves around the *tamāla* trees, embracing them, and had spread over the trees to create a truly exquisite *kuṣja*. Śrī Kṛṣṇa pointed to one creeper and asked Priyājī, “Why is this creeper winding itself around the *tamāla* tree?”

Śrīmatī Rādhikā smilingly answered, “It is the nature of the creeper to cover the *tamāla* tree with its shoots, leaves and flowers. Although this tree has no fruit or flowers of its own, its fortune is that the creeper enhances the tree’s beauty with its own leaves and flowers.” Just then, a breeze caused the creeper to quiver, the sight of which immersed Kīśora-Kīśorī in *bhāva*. This Tamālavana is still present as a reminder of these *līlās*.

Āṭasa

Only the Brajabāsīs are qualified to take *darśana* of and fully relish Kṛṣṇa’s sweet *līlās*, which are filled with topmost bliss (*paramānanda*). Nonetheless, Caturmukha Brahmā, Mahādeva Śaṅkara, Devarṣi Nārada and many *ṛṣis* and *māharṣis* reside in numerous pastime-places in Brajabhūmi, performing *ārāadhanā* of Svayaṁ Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa. This place, called Āṭasa Gaon, is Aṣṭavakra Muni’s place of *ārāadhanā*. Āṭasa is a corrupted form of the word *aṣṭavakra*. This village lies four miles from Janāī Gaon and six miles from Vṛndāvana.

Devī Āṭasa

This village is situated one mile from Āṭasa, and is the place of Ekānamśā-devī, Kṛṣṇa’s twin sister born from Yaśodā’s womb. Vasudevajī took her with him from Gokula to Kāṁsa’s jail. When Kāṁsa received the news that Devakī had given birth to a child, he went to the jail, snatched Ekānamśā from Devakī’s lap and lifted her toward the sky in order to dash her on the ground. When she was lifted into the air, she assumed an eight-handed Durgā form, chastised Kāṁsa, and disappeared in the sky. She then reappeared at this place. Vajranābha established this village in the memory of this pastime.

Magherā

When Kṛṣṇa and Baladeva were seated on Akrūra’s chariot as he was driving Them from Braja to Mathurā, the distressed Brajabāsīs were overwhelmed in separation from Them. Their eyes remained fixed on the road as they saw the dust kicked up by the leaving chariot, and they maintained that same gaze even after the dust had settled back down again. In the memory of this *līlā*, Vajranābha named this village Magherā. This name comes from *magherā*, which means ‘gazing in the direction of the road’.

Chūnarāka

Saubharī Ṛṣi's *āśrama* was here. This place lies one mile west of Kālīya Hrada in Vṛndāvana.

Śakaroyā

Devarāja Indra had committed an offence at the lotus feet of Śrī Kṛṣṇa and the Brajabāsīs, and was therefore an *aparādhī*, or offender. He performed *ārāadhanā* of Śrī Kṛṣṇa at this place to seek for forgiveness. One name of Indra is Śakra, from which the name Śakaroyā is derived. Indra's place of worship thus became known as Śakaroyā.

Barāhara

At the time of cowherding, Śrī Kṛṣṇa played here with the *sakhās* and assumed the form of Varāha. This village lies one mile south-west of Hājara Gaon, and its present name is Barārā. *Bhakti-ratnākara* states:

*eī barāhara grāme varāharūpe te
kheḷāilā kṛṣṇapriyā sakhāra sahite*

"Here in Barāhara, Kṛṣṇa assumed the form of Varāha and played with His dear *sakhās*."

Hārāsali

This is a place of Śrī Kṛṣṇa's *rāsa-līlā*. Nearby is Surukhurū Gaon. One and a half miles north-east of Seī are the two villages of Māī and Basāī. Basāī lies north-east of Māī.

*bhadrāya bhadrārūpāya / sadā kalyāṇa-varddhane
amaṅgalacchide tasmai / namo bhadrāvanāya ca
(Bhaviṣyottare)*

Chapter 13

Śrī Bhadravana

"O Bhadravana, personification of auspiciousness! You perpetually bestow auspiciousness upon all and destroy inauspiciousness. I repeatedly offer my respects unto you."

This pastime-place, situated two miles south-east of Nanda Ghāṭa and across the Yamunā, is one of the places where Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Śrī Balarāma go to graze the cows. The forest of Bhadravana is named after Śrī Balabhadra. It is also beneficial to take *darśana* of Bhadra Sarovara and Gocāraṇa Sthala.

Bhadra Sarovara

*yajṣa-snāna svarūpāya / rājyākhaṇḍa-prade
tīrtharāja namas-tubhyaṁ / bhadrākhyā sarase namaḥ
(Bhaviṣyottare)*

"O Bhadra Sarovara! O Tīrtharāja! I offer you my *namaskāra*. You are the personification of *yajṣa*, and you bestow that post that is never destroyed (*akhaṇḍa rājyapada*)."

That person who bathes in this *sarovara* obtains un-limited wealth and enjoyment, and is finally successful in attaining *premā-bhakti* to Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Śrī Baladeva.

Chapter 14

Bhāṇḍīravana

Bhāṇḍīravana, where Śrī Kṛṣṇa performed a variety of sweet pastimes, is prominent among the twelve forests. Here it is of great value to take *darśana* of Bhāṇḍīra-vaṭa, Veṇu Kūpa, Rāsa-sthalī Varṣīvaṭa, the place of wrestling (*malla-kṛīḍa sthāna*), the *mandira* of Śrīdāmajī, Śyāma Talaiyā, Chāherī Gaon and Āgiyārā Gaon. That place where all kinds of *tattva-jṣāna* fully manifest and where *līlās* that are filled with *aīśvarya* and *madhurya* manifest is called Bhāṇḍīravana. Some of these pastime-places are described below.

Bhāṇḍīravaṭa

This *vaṭa* tree is famous in Bhāṇḍīravana as the site for many different pastimes of Śrī Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa Yugala. At the time of Śrī Kṛṣṇa's *prakaṭa-līlā* a huge *vaṭa* tree stood here full of long branches that spread in all directions. Nearby, Śrī Yamunā made a sweet sound as she followed her meandering course. Śrī Kṛṣṇa, Baladeva and the *sakhās* used to perform various kinds of sports in her waters, and they would cross the river by walking on the branches of this tree. *Śukas*, *sārīs*, peacocks, peahens, cuckoos and *papīhās* were always sitting on the tree's profuse branches and singing. They remained satisfied by eating its fruit. Deer, does and other forest animals drank the sweet water of the Yamunā and took rest in the cool, pleasant shade of the *vaṭa* tree.

It was mostly to this Bhāṇḍīravaṭa that Śrīmatī Yaśodā and the mothers of the other cowherd boys used to send lunch with some *gopas* for their respective sons. While grazing the cows, Śrī Kṛṣṇa, Baladeva and the *sakhās* used to allow the cows to drink water in the Yamunā and freely graze on the lush, green grass of the forest. The boys themselves bathed and engaged in water sports (*jal-kṛīḍā*) in the Yamunā's cool water. They would then sit in the shade under this *vaṭa* tree and eat the various tasty preparations sent by their mothers. Śrī Kṛṣṇa sat in the midst of them all, and the *sakhās* would sit around Him in thousands of rows that extended here and there. Each and every *sakhā*, even those who sat at the back or far away, experienced that Śrī Kṛṣṇa was sitting right in front of him. Their eating was accompanied by laughing and joking and they would play various games together. Brahmā and other demigods in the sky became astonished to see their festive and joyful picnics (*bhojana kṛīḍā-kautuka*).

Brahmā performed the *gāndharva* marriage¹ of Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa Yugala beneath this *vaṭa* tree. According to the *Garga Saṁhitā* and *Gīta-Govinda*, Nanda Bābā once took Śrī Kṛṣṇa to Bhāṇḍīravana to graze the cows. This forest was very attractively covered with densely foliated *tamāla* and *kadamba* trees and lush creepers, and therefore it was only lit by scant sunrays. Suddenly, black clouds gathered from all directions and began to

develop into a raging rainstorm. Darkness pervaded. Nanda Bābā became frightened of the bad omen and carefully hid Kanhaiyā on his lap.

At that moment, the extraordinarily beautiful Vṛṣabhānu Kumārī Śrī Rādhikā appeared. She was decorated from top to toe. She held Her hands out to Nanda Bābā, indicating that She wanted to take Kṛṣṇa in Her arms. The astonished Nanda Bābā gave Śrī Kṛṣṇa to Her. Rādhikā then took Kṛṣṇa to the inner part of Bhāṇḍīravana under the shelter of Bhāṇḍīravaṭa. There Śrī Kṛṣṇa manifested Himself as *manmatha-manmatha kiśora*, a beautiful youth who bewilders the mind of Cupid. Meanwhile, Lalitā, Viśākhā, and the other *sakhīs* also appeared there with Caturmukha Brahmā. Knowing the desire of Kiśora and Kiśorī, Brahmājī performed Their *gāndharva* wedding by reciting Vedic *mantras* and having Them exchange beautiful flower garlands. The delighted *sakhīs* sang wedding songs as the demigods showered flowers from the sky. While everyone looked on, Brahmājī left that place. The *sakhīs* also disappeared, and Kṛṣṇa again assumed the form of a child. Śrīmatī Rādhikā lifted Kṛṣṇa up and handed Him over into the arms of Nanda Bābā, who was standing waiting for Him. Meanwhile, the clouds dispersed and the storm abated. Nanda Bābā now returned with Kṛṣṇa to his Nanda-Braja.

The following incident also took place here in Bhāṇḍīra-vana. One summer's day, Śrī Kṛṣṇa and the *sakhās* brought the cows to drink water at the Yamunā. They then let them graze freely. The boys became so absorbed in their delightful picnic (*bhojana krīḍā-kautuka*) that they were unaware that their cows had wandered off. The cows made their way to the completely parched Muṣjavana, through which even elephants could not force their way. It was the month of Jeṭha (May-June), and the blazing sun scorched the sand. The cows could not find shade anywhere, and had forgotten the pathway to lead them back out of this wild *muṣja* forest. Dying of thirst, they began to cry out in distress. The *sakhās* went to look for the cows without telling Kṛṣṇa and Baladeva where they were going. Finally, they too arrived at the *muṣja* forest in the same dire condition as that of the cows. Meanwhile, the servants of the wicked Kaṁsa set Muṣjavana on fire, and within a moment the wind had spread it everywhere. The fire's blazing flames surrounded the cows and cowherd boys, who saw no other means of rescue than to call out to Kṛṣṇa. They did so, and Śrī Kṛṣṇa arrived immediately. Telling the *sakhās* to close their eyes, He swallowed the forest-fire within a second. Upon opening their eyes, the *sakhās* saw that they were again under the cooling shade of Bhāṇḍīravaṭa, immersed in festive eating pastimes with Kṛṣṇa and Baladeva, the cows grazing peacefully nearby. The distress of the forest-fire seemed like a dream.

The place where Śrī Kṛṣṇa swallowed the forest fire is called Muṣjāṭavī or Īṣikāṭavī, and its present name is Agiyārā. We have already explained this earlier. Across the Yamunā from here is Bhāṇḍīra Gaon, where Kṛṣṇa and the *sakhās* had festive picnics, and where, after Kṛṣṇa swallowed the forest fire, the *sakhās* again began to joke and laugh while eating and the cows happily

chewed grass. This *līlā* took place at Bhāṇḍīra-vaṭa, and is described in *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (10.19.12):

*tatheti mīlitākṣeṣu / bhagavān agnim ulbaṇam
pītvā mukhena tāna kṛcchrād / yogādhīśo vyamocayat*

“‘All right,’ the boys replied, and immediately closed their eyes. Then Bhagavān, the master of all mystic power, opened His mouth and swallowed the terrible fire, saving His friends from danger.”

Veṇu Kūpa

After killing Vatsāsura, Śrī Kṛṣṇa met the *gopīs* near Bhāṇḍīra-vaṭa and boasted His strength. The *gopīs* accused Kṛṣṇa of killing a cow and forbade Him to touch them. Kṛṣṇa said, “I didn’t kill a cow. It was a demon in the form of a calf.” But the *gopīs* did not accept His arguments. Kṛṣṇa then inquired how His purity could be restored and the *gopīs* answered, “If You take bath in all the *tīrthas* on the earth, You will again become pure and can touch us.” After hearing the words of the *gopīs*, Kṛṣṇa created a beautiful well (*kūpa*) with His *veṇu* and summoned all the *tīrthas* of the earth to enter it. He then took bath in that well and met with the *gopīs*.

This well known as Veṇu Kūpa is situated near Bhāṇḍīra-vaṭa. By taking bath in it, one obtains the same result as by taking bath in every *tīrtha*. Even today, the women of Braja worship this well on certain occasions. Those who do not have a child or whose child has died untimely make a vow to propitiate the deity here by their worship. Their hearts’ desires are then fulfilled.

Śrī Baladevajī Mandira

Śrī Balabhadrajī, His younger brother Kanhaiyā and the *sakhās* used to come to Bhāṇḍīra-vaṭa to pasture the cows. Śrī Balabhadrajī presides over the forests on the east side of the Yamunā – Bhadravana, Bhāṇḍīra-vaṭa, Baelvana, Gokula-Mahāvana, Lohavana and so on. Therefore, all these places have *mandiras* of Śrī Baladevajī. It is recommended that one take *darśana* of the *mandira* of Baladeva in Bhāṇḍīra-vaṭa.

Chāherī Gaon

The village located between Bhāṇḍīra-vaṭa and Vamśīvaṭa is called Chāherī Gaon. After playing with the *sakhās* in Bhāṇḍīra-vaṭa, Śrī Kṛṣṇa and His friends used to come here, sit in the shade underneath the trees, and enjoy their meals with much joy and laughter. The name Chāherī is derived from the word *chāyā*, which means shade or shadow. This village is also called Bijaulī Grāma.

Rāsa-sthalī Vamśīvaṭa

Śrī Kṛṣṇa’s *rāsa-sthalī* at Vamśīvaṭa is situated a short distance from Bhāṇḍīra-vaṭa. This Vamśīvaṭa is a different place from the Vamśīvaṭa in Vṛndāvana. At the time of cow-herding, Śrī Kṛṣṇa would climb this *vaṭa* tree

and play His flute to call the cows. In this way, He would gather them and bring them all back home. Sometimes, on a beautiful, pleasant night, He would also call His beloved *gopīs* from here – “Rādhike! Lalite! Viśākhē!” Upon their arrival, *rāsa-līlā* would unfold under this Vamśīvaṭa.

Śrīdāmajī’s Mandira

Beneath this Vamśīvaṭa is the *mandira* of Śrīdāma Bhaiyā. When Śrī Kṛṣṇa went to Mathurā, Śrīdāma Sakhā was heart-broken in separation. He went to this solitary Vamśīvaṭa, where he remembered Śrī Kṛṣṇa’s sweet pastimes, filling his heart with sorrow. Many days later, when Śrī Kṛṣṇa returned to Gokula after killing Dantavakra, He again met with Śrīdāma here and took Śrīdāma with Him. One can have *darśana* of Śrīdāma in the *mandira* here.

Śyāma Talaiyā

This *talaiyā*, pond, is situated near Vamśīvaṭa. When the *gopīs* became thirsty during *rāsa*, Śrī Śyāmasundara mani-fested this *talaiyā* with His *vamśī* and satisfied each and every *gopī* with its luscious water. Nowadays, this *talaiyā* lies in a completely dilapidated condition with very little water, but still, people take *ācamana* here with faith.

Chapter 15

Māṭavana

Māṭavana is one of the main forests of Braja Maṇḍala. It is a wide and spacious area on the bank of the Yamunā. Kṛṣṇa and Balabhadra would bring the cows to graze in this enchanting forest full of lush trees and creepers, green grass and untold varieties of fruits and flowers. The many pastimes places here include Māṭa or Māṇṭa Gaon, Kṛṣṇa Kuṇḍa, Ḍāṅgolī Gaon, Māna Sarovara, Pānī Gaon and Durvāsā Āśrama.

Māṭa Gaon

The word *māṭa* refers to a large earthen pot meant for churning yoghurt and other substances. During Kṛṣṇa’s pastimes, these pots were made here and used by the Brajabāsīs in their daily household chores; hence the village is known as Māṭa. It lies two miles south of Bhāṇḍīravaṭa and five miles north of Vṛndāvana on the other side of the Yamunā. The land in Māṭavana is for cow grazing, and there is a famous *mandira* of Baladevajī here. In *Bhakti-ratnākara*, Māṭa Gaon is described as follows:

*eī ‘māṭhagrāma’ – mahā ānanda ekhāne
nānā kṛīḍā kare rāmakṛṣṇa sakhāsane
mṛttika-nirmīta bṛhat pātra – māṭha nāma
māṭhotpatti-prasasta-e hetu māṭha grāma
dadhimanthanādi lāgi brajavāsīgaṇa
layena asaṅkhyā māṭha – aise sabe kana*

“In Māṭha Grāma, Rāma and Kṛṣṇa would play with their friends. This place is so named after the huge earthen vessel called a *māṭha*, which the Brajabāsīs would use to churn their buttermilk from yoghurt.”

Pānī Gaon

This village situated on the bank of the Yamunā is two miles south of Māna Sarovara and a quarter of a mile south-east of Vṛndāvana. It is also known as Pānī Ghāṭa.

At the time of Kṛṣṇa's pastimes, Maharṣi Durvāsā stayed at his *āśrama* near Pānī Gaon. Once, the *gopīs* of Vṛndāvana wanted to please Maharṣi Durvāsā with a large selection of very delicious food preparations, which they were going to carry from Vṛndāvana across the Yamunā to his *āśrama*. Yamunā was in flood due to the monsoon season, and her waves were so high that no boatman was courageous enough to ferry the *gopīs* across the river. Suddenly, Kṛṣṇa appeared and smilingly asked them why they were in anxiety. They told Him about their dilemma. Kṛṣṇa said, "You can easily cross the river. Go to the Yamunā's shore and say to her in unison, 'If Kṛṣṇa has not seen the face of any woman, then, on the strength of His firm *brahmacarya* (vow of celibacy), may we easily cross the river on foot.'" The *gopīs* did as Kṛṣṇa had told them and crossed the river on foot, arriving at Maharṣi Durvāsā's *āśrama* with all their foodstuffs. There, the hundreds and thousands of *gopīs* pleased Durvāsājī with a vast spread of delicious foods. Being satisfied, he blessed them that their hearts' desires would be fulfilled. When they were ready to return, they told Maharṣi Durvāsā the difficulty they faced in crossing the river. He said, "Tell Yamunājī, 'If Durvāsājī has not eaten any cooked food, then, on the strength of his austerities, may we cross over to Vṛndāvana on foot.'" They did so and reached Vṛndāvana by walking upon the Yamunā's waters.

The *gopīs* were greatly astonished that they had been able to cross the Yamunā on foot on the strength of Kṛṣṇa and Maharṣi Durvāsā's declarations. Śrī Kṛṣṇa had been in the company of women since birth and Maharṣi Durvāsā had devoured everything they had just brought him. They enquired from Śrī Kṛṣṇa about this mystery. Very seriously, He replied, "Although I stay with all of you day and night, My *brahmacarya* nonetheless remains intact, because I do not possess even the slightest *bhoktā abhimāna*, or identity of being the enjoyer. Durvāsājī is also free from *bhoktā abhimāna*; therefore, although he has eaten everything, he has eaten nothing. A person is attached to this material existence by thinking himself to be the enjoyer." The *gopīs* looked at Kṛṣṇa in great astonishment. That place where the *gopīs* crossed the Yamunā is called Pānī Gaon or Pānī Ghāṭa.

Durvāsā Āśrama

This place lies across the Yamunā one mile north of Viśrāma Ghāṭa in Mathurā. It is Maharṣi Durvāsā's place of austerities. It was from here that Durvāsā crossed the Yamunā on Dvādaśī and went to the palace of Ambarīṣa Mahārāja in Mathurā just when the king was due to break his Ekādaśī fast (*pāraṇa*). This pastime has been narrated in detail in *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (Ninth Canto, Fourth Chapter). Just near Durvāsā Āśrama is the *āśrama* of Maharṣi Parāśara. Śrī Vyāsa and other *ṛṣis* and *munis* would visit Maharṣi

Parāśara there. Close by, on the bank of Yamunā, was the *āśrama* of Dattātreya-jī. Satyavatī, also known as Matsyagandhā, the mother of Śrī Vyasādeva, stayed here with her father, the boatman who had raised her. The island on which Kṛṣṇa-dvaipāyana Śrī Vedavyāsa took birth is in the Yamunā nearby. At Durvāsā Āśrama, the *gopīs* satisfied Maharṣi Durvāsā by offering him various kinds of delicious foodstuffs.

Today a large and magnificent temple has been built here that is unique in Braja.¹ This *mandira* has deities of Maharṣi Durvāsājī, Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu, Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa and others.

Kṛṣṇa Kuṇḍa

This *kuṇḍa* is situated in Gāṅgrali Gaon, which lies between Māṭa and Baelvana. Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the *sakhās* and the cows would drink water here and delight in playful games in the water (*jal-vihāra*).

Māna Sarovara

At the time of *śārādīya rāsa*, Śrīmatī Rādhikā saw Her beloved Kṛṣṇa dancing on the bank of the Yamunā with the other *gopīs*. This threw Her into such a state of *māna* that was very difficult to subdue. She left the place of *rāsa* on Her own, crossed the Yamunā, and came to this solitary forest. Distressed in separation from Kṛṣṇa, She began to cry, and the stream of tears that flowed from Her eyes created this *sarovara*. *Rasika-śekhara* Śrī Kṛṣṇa searched for Śrīmatījī and found Her here. Offering His *veṇu* and His head at Her lotus feet, He admitted His fault and assured Her that He would never act like that again.

This charming place is embellished by the dense shade of the *pīlū*, *kadamba* and *tamāla* trees and by the peacocks, cuckoos, swans, deer and other birds and animals. It remains visible to our eyes to this present day simply to remind us of the pastimes of Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa Yugala.

In the old *mandira* on the bank of Māna Sarovara, one can have *darśana* of a painting that is worshipped there. In the painting, Śrī Kṛṣṇa is offering His flute and His head at the lotus feet of Śrīmatī Rādhikā in an effort to break Her *māna*. Kṛṣṇa is looking at Her as if to say, *smara-garala-khaṇḍanam mama śirasi maṇḍanam dehi pada-pallavam udāram*.²

*tapaḥ siddhi pradāyaiva / namo bilvavanāya ca
janārdana namastubhyaṁ / bilveśāya namostu te
(Bhaviṣyottara Purāṇa)*

Chapter 16

Baelvana (Bilvavana)

“O Bilvavana, bestower of the perfection of austerities! I bow down to you. O Janārdana! O master of Bilva-vana! Obeisances unto you.”

This forest is called Baelvana because, during Kṛṣṇa’s *prakaṭa-līlā*, there was an abundance of *bael* (*bilva*) trees here. While grazing the cows in this most

captivating and pleas-ant forest, Śrī Kṛṣṇa and His *sakhās* would play different kinds of sports and relish the ripe *bael* fruits. This is des-cribed in *Bhakti-ratnākara*:

*rāmakṛṣṇa sakhā saha e bilvavanete
pakka bilvaphala bhuṣje mahākautukete*

“It was here that Rāma, Kṛṣṇa and the *sakhās* ate ripe *bael* (*bilva*) fruits with great festivity.”

Once, Śrī Lakṣmī heard a description from the mouth of Nārada about Brajendra-nandana Śrī Kṛṣṇa’s sweet *rāsa-līlā* and the good fortune of the *gopīs*. An eager desire to see this *rāsa-līlā* arose in her heart. No one but the *gopīs* has the qualification to enter *rāsa-līlā*, since they are the true emblem of undivided *viśuddha prema*. It is only possible to gain entrance into *rāsa-līlā* by receiving the mercy of Śrīmatī Rādhikā, the embodiment of *mahābhāva* and the crest-jewel of all Kṛṣṇa’s beloveds, and by the mercy of Her true representatives, the *gopīs*. At that time, one can gain entrance very easily. Thus, Lakṣmī began performing severe austerities at this place to enter into the *rāsa-līlā*, but to no avail. To this day, she is performing austerities here with this desire. In *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*,¹ the wives of the serpent Kālīya refer to this pastime in their prayers to Śrī Kṛṣṇa: “Bhagavān! We are unable to understand what *sādhana* Kālīyanāga performed that He became a proprietor of the dust of Your lotus feet. It is so rare to procure this dust that even Your wife Śrī Lakṣmī was unable to obtain it, even after giving up all sense-pleasures and performing austerities for a very long time in conformity with the prescribed rules and regulations.”

Just nearby are Kṛṣṇa Kuṇḍa and a *baiṭhaka* of Śrī Vallabhācārya. There is also a temple of Śrī Lakṣmī here.

Chapter 17

Lohavana

This place lies just across the Yamunā from Mathurā, approximate two miles north-east of the Mathurā-Gokula highway. *Bhakti-ratnākara* describes Lohavana as follows:

*lohavane kṛṣṇera adbhuta-gocāraṇa
nānāpuṣpa sugandhe vyāpita ramyasthāna
ethā lohajaṅghāsura badhe bhagavān
lohajaṅghavana nāma hayata ihāra*

“The forest of Lohavana is decorated with all types of trees and flowers and is one of the places where Kṛṣṇa pastures His cows. It is called Lohavana because, while grazing the cows here, Śrī Kṛṣṇa killed Lohajaṅghāsura.”

At a Yamunā *ghāṭa* close to Lohavana, Kṛṣṇa enjoyed boating-pastimes (*naukā-vihāra*) in the company of the *gopīs*. This *līlā* has been beautifully described in *Bhakti-ratnākara*:

*yamunā-nikaṭe yāi śrīnivāse kaya
eī ghāṭe kṛṣṇa naukā-kṛīḍā ārambhayā
se atī kautuka rāī sakhīra sahite*

*dugdhādi laīyā āisena pāra haite
dekhi, se apūrva śobhā kṛṣṇa mugdha haīyā
eka bhīte rahilena jīrṇa naukā laīyā
śrī-rādhikā sakhīsaha kahe bāre-bāre
pāra kara nāvika-yāiba śīghra pāre*

“Lohavana is a charming and delightful place adorned with attractive flowers of all kinds. Nearby, in the virtuous Yamunā, Śrī Kṛṣṇa performs *naukā-vihāra* with the *gopīs*. Disguised as a boatman, He seats the beautiful young cowherd girls in His boat and takes them out into the middle of the Yamunā’s flowing waters. Then He says, ‘My old dilapidated boat is leaking, and water is rushing in. Throw all your pots of milk and yoghurt overboard; other-wise, it will surely sink.’ The *gopīs* beg and beseech this boatman to quickly take them to the other side of the river.”

This pastime-place still lies here today, and concealed within it is Kṛṣṇa’s *nauka-vihāra* with the *gopīs*. One can also have *darśana* of Kṛṣṇa Kuṇḍa, Lohāsura’s cave and Śrī Gopīnāthajī here.

Āyore Grāma

This village lies near Lohavana. Its current name is Ālīpura. When Kṛṣṇa killed Dantavakra, He crossed the Yamunā and started for Gokula, where He was to meet with the Brajabāsīs – His mother, father, *sakhās*, *gopas* and *gopīs*. They met Him at this place, crying out with great love, *Āyore! Āyore, kanhaiyā!* (“He is coming! Kanhaiyā is coming!”) This village therefore became known as Āyore. *Bhakti-ratnākara* describes this poignant scene.¹

Gaurava (Gorvāi Gaon)

Gorvāi Grāma lies near Āyore Grāma. Nanda Mahārāja resided here for some days along with the other *gopas* and *gopīs* after they had returned from Kurukṣetra. *Bhakti-ratnākara* states that at the time of *kṛṣṇa-līlā* there was a well-known village named Tānā in this very area, where an exceptionally wealthy *zamīndār* lived. He had a close, affectionate relationship with Nanda Mahārāja. When Nanda Bābā and the *gopas* and *gopīs* were journeying to Gokula, they arrived at this village. That landlord happily welcomed them with great honour and joy and accom-modated them in his village for several days, serving them with much respect. This place has therefore become famous as Gaurava or Gorvāi, deriving from the word *gaurava denā*, meaning ‘to give honour’.

Bandī-Ānandī

A short distance to the south of Lohavana is the village of Bandī-Ānandī. Bandī and Ānandī were two *devīs* who would use the excuse of making cow-dung patties at Śrī Nanda Bābā’s place to get the *darśana* of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. The *kuṇḍas* of Bandī and Ānandī are still present today in memory of these two *devīs*.

Dāūjī: the place of Baladeva

The village of Dāūjī is situated sixteen kilometres south of Rāyā and twenty-four kilometres from Mathurā. This village was originally called Rīḍhā, but is currently known as Dāūjī. In the *mandira* here, there is an extremely attractive *śyāma*-complexioned *śrī vigraha* of Dāūjī. Revatījī is present here, but is hidden to the side of Him behind the door. The confidential reason why she is somewhat concealed is that Śrī Dāūjī's marriage took place while He was residing in Dvārakā and not while He was living in Braja.

Vajranābha established the deity of Śrī Dāūjī. All the famous deities of Braja left Braja, but Dāūjī did not leave even after He revealed Himself to the *yavanas* (Muslims). It is said that this deity was found lying upside down in Kṣīrāsāgara (Saṅkarṣaṇa Kuṇḍa) which is situated on the western side of this temple. Devoted persons took Śrī Dāūjī from the *kuṇḍa* and built this temple, in which they duly seated and worshipped Him. The *pujārīs* may have put the deity in the *kuṇḍa* out of fear of an attack by the bigot Aurangzeb.

Dāūjī's birth from the womb of mother Rohiṇī, eight days before the birth of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, took place in Gokula-Mahāvana. His *nāma-karaṇa*, *cūḍā-karaṇa* and other *saṁskāras* were performed with those of baby Kṛṣṇa. Dāūjī and Kṛṣṇa would also play and crawl around together.

Rīḍhā or Dāūjī Gaon is the pasturing ground for Śrī Baladāūjī's cows, being a forest area at the time of His *prakaṭa-līlā*. This place is within Vidrumavana.

Chapter 18

Mahāvana-Gokula

Mahāvana is situated about six miles east of Mathurā. It is also called Bṛhadvana, because it is the largest (*bṛhad*) of all the forests (*vanas*). In fact this forest has three names: Mahāvana, Gokula and Bṛhadvana. This Gokula is non-different from Goloka.¹

Parjanya Gopa, the father of Goparāja Nanda Bābā, initially resided at Nandagaon where he had five sons – namely Upānanda, Abhinanda, Śrī Nanda, Sunanda and Nandana – and two daughters named Sanandā and Nandinī. Also, while staying here he gave all his sons and daughters in marriage. His middle son, Śrī Nanda, had no offspring. This caused Parjanya Gopa some concern, so he worshipped Nārāyaṇa in the hope that Nanda would father a child. By a voice in the sky, he came to know that a very brave son would soon be born to Śrī Nanda. This son would possess all good qualities and annihilate every demon.

Some time after this aerial prophecy, Keśī and other demons began to cause a disturbance in Nandagaon. Parjanya Gopa together with his family and all of his relatives moved here to Bṛhadvana. The Yamunā flows close by Bṛhadvana, or Mahāvana. This forest is beautifully decorated with different kinds of trees, creepers and flowers, and there are lush, green meadows for the cows to graze on. Beholding this beauty, the Brajabāsī *gopas* became very pleased and happily began to reside here.

Yaśodā Maiyā gave birth to the twins Kṛṣṇa Kanhaiyā and Yogamāyā at midnight, in the delivery room at Nanda Bhavan in Mahāvana. The umbilical cord was cut (*nāḍiccheda*) and other Vedic *saṁskaras* were performed here in mother Yaśodā's delivery room.

Kṛṣṇa killed the demons Pūtanā, Tṛṇāvarta and Śakaṭāsura here, thus liberating them. Kṛṣṇa and Baladeva's name-giving ceremony also took place at Mahāvana, in the nearby *gośālā* of Nanda Mahārāja. It was here that Rāma and Kṛṣṇa started to crawl on Their knees, that mother Yaśodā tied naughty baby Kṛṣṇa to a mortar, and that Kṛṣṇa delivered the Yamalānjuna trees. The childhood pastimes of Kṛṣṇa and Rāma up to the age of two and a half to three years took place here in Mahāvana. These pastimes are briefly described further on.

The Pastime-places of Mahāvana

The pastime-places of Bṛhadvana, or Mahāvana, are mentioned in the *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* as follows:

*ekaviṁśati tīrthānām / yuktaṁ bhūriguṇānvitam
yamalānjuna puṇyātmānam / nanda-kūpaṁ tathaiva ca
cintāharaṇaṁ brahmaṇḍaṁ / kuṇḍaṁ sārasvataṁ tathā
sarasvatī-śilā tatra / viṣṇu-kuṇḍaṁ samanvitam
karṇa-kūpaṁ kṛṣṇa-kuṇḍaṁ / gopa-kūpaṁ tathaiva ca
ramaṇaṁ ramaṇa-sthānaṁ / tṛṇāvartākhyā-pātanam
pūtanā-pātanasthānaṁ / tṛṇāvartākhyā-pātanam
nanda-harmya nandageha / ghaṭaṁ ramaṇa-saṁjśakam
mathurānāthodbhavaṁ / kṣetraṁ puṇyaṁ pāpa-pranāśanam
janma-sthānaṁ tu śeṣasya / janma yogamāyayā*

"In Mahāvana, there are twenty-one *tīrthas*, which are filled with many good qualities. They include Yamalānjuna-uddhāra-sthala, Nanda Kūpa, Cintāharaṇa Ghāṭa, Brahmāṇḍa Ghāṭa, Sārasvata Kuṇḍa, Sarasvatī Śilā, Viṣṇu Kuṇḍa, Karṇa Kūpa, Kṛṣṇa Kuṇḍa, Gopa Kūpa, Ramaṇa Reti, Tṛṇāvarta-badha-sthala, Pūtanā-badha-sthala, Nanda's palace, Nanda Bhavan, Ramaṇa Ghāṭa and Mathurā Kṣetra, the birthplace of Mathurānātha, Śeṣa (Balarāma) and Yogamāyā. Visiting Mathurā Kṣetra dispels all one's sins and brings about all auspiciousness."

The pastimes-places mentioned in both *Braja-bhakti-vilāsa* and *Bhakti-ratnākara* are Yamalānjuna-uddhāra-sthala, (the place where the Yamalānjuna trees were delivered), Pūtanā-badha-sthala (the place where Pūtanā was killed), Śakaṭa-bhaṣjana-sthāna (the place where the cart was broken), Sapta-sāṁudrika Kūpa, and Gopīśvara Mahādeva. Additionally, *Braja-bhakti-vilāsa* mentions Śrī Nanda Mandira, Yaśodā Śayana-sthala (Yaśodā's resting-place), Okhala-sthala (the place of the mortar), Yogamāyā-janma-sthala (the birthplace of Yogamāyā), Bāla Gokuleśvara and Rohiṇī Mandira. *Bhakti-ratnākara* further mentions Janma-sthāna (Kṛṣṇa's birthplace), Janma-saṁskāra-sthāna (the place where the sanctifying ceremonies took place at the time of birth), Gośālā (cowshed), Nāma-karaṇa-

sthāna (the place of the name-giving ceremony), Agni-saṁskāra-sthala, Stanya-pāna-sthala, Tṛṇāvarta-badha-sthala (the place where Tṛṇāvarta was killed), the place where Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma crawled on Their knees, Brahmāṇḍa Ghāṭa, Yaśodājī's courtyard, Navanīta-corī-sthala (the place where *navanīta*, or the fresh butter, was stolen), Dāmodara-līlā-sthala (the place where the Dāmodara-līlā took place), Śrī Sanātana Gosvāmī's *bhajana-sthalī*, the place of Madana-Mohanajī, Ramaṇa Retī, Gopa Kūpa, the residences of Upānanda and the other *gopas*, the place of Śrī Kṛṣṇa's birth-ceremony and other ceremonies, Gopa Baiṭhaka, Vṛndāvana Gamana-patha (the path to go to Vṛndāvana), Sakraulī, and so forth.

We will now describe those places of *darśana* that still remain visible today.

Danta-dhāvana Ṭilā

Nanda Mahārāja would sit on this small hill (*ṭilā*) and clean his teeth (*danta-dhāvana*) with a twig.

Nanda Bābā kī havelī (Nanda Bābā's house)

Around the base of Danta-dhāvana Ṭilā stood the residences of Nanda and his brothers and relatives. The ruins of these houses can still be seen today, even from a distance.

Nanda Bhavan (Kṛṣṇa's birthplace)

Svayaṁ Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Yogamāyā took birth as twins from the womb of mother Yaśodā in her room in Nanda's palace. They were born at midnight on Āṣṭamī (the eighth day after the full moon) in the month of Bhādra when the *nakṣatra* named Rohiṇī was visible in the sky.

One can take *darśana* of Yogamāyā here. *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* vividly describes how the most fortunate Nanda Bābā became very joyful upon receiving a son. After the ceremony known as *nāḍīcheda-saṁskāra* had been performed, in which the umbilical cord is cut, baby Kṛṣṇa was bathed and so on. Nanda Bābā then called the *brāhmaṇas* to perform the various *saṁskaras* and other rites of childbirth.² Śrī Raghu-pati Upādyaḥya says:

*śrutim apare smṛtim itare
bhāratam anye bhajantu bhava-bhītāḥ
aham iha nandaṁ vande
yasyālinde param brahma*

(Śrī Padyāvalī, text 127)

"In a world frightened by birth and death, some people take shelter of the *śrutis*, some of the *smṛtis* and some of the *Mahābhārata*. But I pray to Śrī Nandarāya, in whose court-yard Parabrahma is playing as a child."

Pūtanā-uddhāra-sthala (the place where Pūtanā was liberated)

Pūtanā disguised herself as a mother, smeared her breasts with deadly poison, and came to this place in Nanda Bhavan. Directly in front of Yaśodā and Rohiṇī, she was able to very easily pick up sleeping baby Kṛṣṇa from the

cradle, put Him on her lap and begin to breast-feed Him. Kṛṣṇa sucked out the deadly poison together with her life, thus liberating her from the body of a *rākṣasī*. He then gave her the position of a *dhātrī*, a nurse or foster-mother, in Goloka.

In a previous life, Pūtānā was Ratnamālā, the daughter of Bali Mahārāja. When, in the palace of her father, she beheld the beauty of Lord Vāmanadeva, she desired to have a son just like Him. But when Vāmanadeva took away everything from Bali Mahārāja and bound him with a rope of snakes (*nāgapāśa*), she began to cry. She thought, “I would kill such a cruel son by feeding him breast milk mixed with poison.” Knowing her desire, Lord Vāmanadeva gave her this boon, saying, *Evam astu*. (“So be it.”). Śrī Kṛṣṇa therefore killed her in that form and gave her the proper identity of a *dhātrī*.

Śakaṭa-bhaṣjana-sthāna (the place where the cart was broken)

Once, Kṛṣṇa was sleeping in a cradle under a cart while mother Yaśodā busied herself with His birthday ceremony. Just then, a demon sent by Kāṁsa entered into that cart and began to press it down with the intention of crushing and killing Kṛṣṇa. The naughty baby Kṛṣṇa, however, made a joyous cry and, with a kick of His foot, very easily killed that demon. The cart collapsed and the pots that were filled with milk, yoghurt, butter and other ingredients shattered to pieces. Hearing the baby’s cry, mother Yaśodā rushed to the scene and became struck with wonder. When she saw that her Kṛṣṇa was safe, she called for the *brāhmaṇas* and donated many cows in charity. The *brāhmaṇas* then performed Kṛṣṇa’s *abhiṣeka* using the urine and dung of a black cow and recited Vedic *mantras* for protection. To this day, the memories of this *līlā* remain present at this place.

In his previous life, Śakaṭāsura was the son of the demon Hiraṇyākṣa. His name was Utkaca and he was also a demon. Once, he had trampled on and destroyed the lush, green trees and creepers in Lomaśa Ṛṣi’s *āśrama*. The *ṛṣi* became filled with anger and cursed him, saying, “Villain, may you become bodiless!” Hearing this, Utkaca fell at the lotus feet of the *ṛṣi* begging for forgiveness. The *ṛṣi* said, “You will be liberated by the touch of Kṛṣṇa’s lotus feet during the reign of Vaivasvata Manu.” That same demon who was concealed within the cart tried to crush Kṛṣṇa but, by the touch of Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa’s lotus feet, he became liberated. This *līlā* is described in *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (Tenth Canto, Seventh Chapter).

Tṛṇāvarta-badha-sthala (the place where Tṛṇāvarta was killed)

Once, Kāṁsa sent a demon named Tṛṇāvarta to Gokula to kill Kṛṣṇa. Upon the advice of Kāṁsa, Tṛṇāvarta assumed the form of a whirlwind and entered Gokula. The demon seized Kṛṣṇa, who was sitting beside mother Yaśodā, and flew into the sky. Baby Kṛṣṇa caught his neck as any baby might, but this choked the demon. Tṛṇāvarta’s eyes popped out from their sockets, and he fell to the earth and died.³

Dadhi-manthana-sthala (the place where yoghurt was churned)

Yaśodā would churn yoghurt here. Once, during the last part of the night, baby Kṛṣṇa was sleeping on His bed. The previous day, Yaśodā Maiyā had sent all of her servants and maidservants to their respective homes for the occasion of Dīpāvalī. In the morning, she churned the yoghurt herself, so she would be able to feed fresh butter to Kṛṣṇa. As she churned away, she absorbed herself in singing about Kṛṣṇa's pastimes in a high and melodious voice. Kṛṣṇa awoke and, feeling hungry, searched for His mother. He climbed out of His bed. Crying and stumbling along with great difficulty, He somehow managed to reach mother Yaśodā, who affectionately placed Him on her lap and began to breast-feed Him.

However, when she was only midway through feeding Him, the milk on the fire nearby began to boil over. Mother Yaśodā forcefully put Kṛṣṇa on the floor and went to take care of the milk. Baby Kṛṣṇa was still unsatisfied and He began to quiver in uncontrollable anger. Taking up a stone pestle, He punched a hole in the churning pot and liquid yoghurt flowed all over the floor. Kṛṣṇa trampled through the stream of yoghurt before walking into the house and climbing upon an upside-down mortar. Taking butter from a hanging pot, He ate some Himself and then began to feed some to the monkeys and crows. Upon returning from the fire nearby, Yaśodā Maiyā saw signs of her child's activities and began to smile. Creeping up behind Kṛṣṇa, she went to catch Him, but He caught sight of her, jumped off the mortar and fled. But mother Yaśodā ran faster than Kṛṣṇa and caught hold of Him from behind. To punish Him, she tied Him to the mortar and then busied herself with her house-hold duties.

Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam (10.9.18) states:

*sva-mātuḥ svinna-gātrāyā
visrasta-kabara-srajaḥ
dṛṣṭvā pariśramaṁ kṛṣṇaḥ
kṛpayā 'sīt sva-bandhane*

“Because of mother Yaśodā's hard labour, her whole body became covered with perspiration, and the flowers and comb were falling from her hair. When the child Kṛṣṇa saw His mother thus fatigued, He became merciful to her and agreed to be bound.”

Kṛṣṇa and His *sakhās* began to drag the grinding mortar, touching and delivering the sons of Kuvera, who had been cursed in a previous life to become trees. This pastime is described in detail in *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (Tenth Canto, Ninth and Tenth Chapters).

Mother Yaśodā had tied Kṛṣṇa to the mortar right here in Nanda Bhavan, and the place where Nalakuvera and Maṇigrīva were delivered lies just outside. The present location of Caurāsī Khambā is where Kṛṣṇa's umbilical cord was cut, and nearby lies Nanda Kūpa, Nanda's well.

Nanda Baba's gośālā

Gargācārya performed Kṛṣṇa and Baladeva's name-giving ceremony (*nāma-karaṇa saṁskāra*) in this solitary *gośālā*. During the ceremony, Gargācārya

predicted that Śrī Bala-rāma and Kṛṣṇa would possess astonishing prowess, would annihilate demons, and would perform other divine pastimes. Nanda Mahārāja performed the name-giving ceremony without any festivities because he feared Kāmsa's atrocities.

Malla Tīrtha

Here, the naked babies Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma wrestled with each other. The *gopīs* encouraged Them to wrestle by offering to give the winner a *laḍḍū*. At this, the two boys, each desiring to defeat the other, began to wrestle. Today, Gopīśvara Mahādeva is here.

Nanda Kūpa

This well is also known as Saptasāmudrika Kūpa. Mahārāja Nanda used to draw water from it. It is said that the demi-gods manifested it for the service of Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Its water stays warm in the winter and cool in the summer, and liberates one who bathes in it from all sins.

Śrī Sanātana Gosvāmī's place of bhajana

Below the temple of Caurāsī Khambā, near Sāmudrika Kūpa, is Sanātana Gosvāmī's *bhajana-kuṭī* situated inside a cave. As recorded in *Bhakti-ratnākara*, Sanātana Gosvāmī would come to Gokula occasionally. He would perform *bhajana* at this place, and daily take *darśana* of Śrī Madana-Gopāla.⁴

Once, Sanātana Gosvāmī was amazed by an extraordinary child he saw playing in the pleasant sand on the bank of the Yamunā. When the child had finished his game, Sanātana Gosvāmī followed him into the temple of Śrī Madana-Gopāla. Upon entering the temple, however, Sanātana Gosvāmī could only see the deity. Some time later in Mathurā, Sanātana Gosvāmī saw that same Śrī Madana-Gopāla playing in the house of a Caubāin with her son. Śrī Madana-Gopāla requested Sanātana-jī to take Him with him to Vṛndāvana. Sanātana Gosvāmī brought Him to his *bhajana-kuṭī*, and later had a magnificent temple constructed for Him, where he arranged for His *sevā* and *pūjā*.

Brahmāṇḍa Ghāṭa

This place lies approximately one mile east of Nanda Bhavan, the birthplace of Kṛṣṇa. Here, Bāla Kṛṣṇa ate earth while playing with the cowherd boys. The boys saw this and told mother Yaśodā, who asked Balarāma about it. Balarāma verified the fact. She went to Kṛṣṇa and asked Him herself, "Have You eaten clay?"

He replied, "No, Maiyā! I did not eat clay."

"Alright, Kanhaiyā, open Your mouth and show me."

"You can see, Maiyā," He said as He opened His mouth.

Looking into Kanhaiyā's mouth, Maiyā became dumb-struck. There, she saw innumerable *brahmāṇḍas*, countless Brahmās, Viṣṇus and Maheśas, and all

moving and non-moving entities. She closed her eyes in fear and thought, “What is this that I am seeing? Is it an illusion or someone’s magical powers?” Upon opening her eyes, mother Yaśodā saw that Kanhaiyā was sitting in her lap. She returned to the house and called the *brāhmaṇas*, who recited blessings to pacify the wrath of the Supreme. She also donated cows and other valuables to the *brāhmaṇas*.

Although Yaśodā Maiyā had directly witnessed Kṛṣṇa’s *bhagavattā* in the form of countless universes and all animate and inanimate objects situated within His mouth, she never accepted Kṛṣṇa as Svayaṁ Bhagavān. Her *vātsalya-prema* blossomed rather than weakened. By contrast, when Devakī and Vasudeva beheld Kṛṣṇa’s four-armed form, their *vātsalya-prema* weakened. Similarly, Arjuna’s *sakhya-bhāva* weakened when he saw Kṛṣṇa’s universal form. Devakī, Vasudeva and Arjuna folded their hands and began to praise Kṛṣṇa and pray to Him. In Braja, however, the *prema* of the Brajabāsīs does not weaken even when Kṛṣṇa mani-fests Himself as Bhagavān. Their sweet mood towards Śrī Kṛṣṇa never diminishes because they never accept Him as Bhagavān.

Another time, Bāla Kṛṣṇa was playing here with His companions, the cowherd boys, when the boys unexpectedly began to tease Him and laugh and clap. At first, Kanhaiyā did not understand why and was bewildered by what was happening, but then He understood. Dāma, Śrīdāma, Madhumaṅgala and the other cowherd boys were saying, “Nanda Bābā is fair-complexioned and Yaśodā Maiyā is fair-complexioned, but You are black. Why? The fact is that You were not born from Yaśodā Maiyā’s womb. You are not her child. Someone else gave birth to You, but being unable to bring You up, they put You in the hollow of a banyan tree. The supremely merciful Nanda Bābā found You there crying helplessly. He picked You up and placed You in the lap of mother Yaśodā, but, in reality, You are not the son of Nanda and Yaśodā.”

Kanhaiyā stopped playing and went home weeping. He began to roll around in the courtyard. Mother Yaśodā affectionately picked Him up in her arms and tried to find out why He was crying. But today Kanhaiyā refused to sit in her lap. She then forcibly took Him in her arms, brushed the dust from His limbs, and asked Him what had happened. After Kanhaiyā calmed down a little, He said, “Dāma, Śrīdāma and the other cowherd boys are saying, ‘You were not born from Maiyā’s womb. Bābā is fair-complexioned and Maiyā is fair-complexioned, so where did You, who are black, come from?’”

Hearing this, Maiyā started laughing and said, “*Are lālā!* Who else is saying this?”

“Dāū Bhaiyā.”

Maiyā, put her hand on Kṛṣṇa’s forehead and said, “I take an oath before Śrī Nārāyaṇa that You are my son born from my womb. I will chastise those children.” She then began to breast-feed Kṛṣṇa.

In reality, Nanda Bābā was of a fair complexion, but mother Yaśodā, who was a very beautiful *gopī*, was slightly dark in hue. How else could Kṛṣṇa have

been so beautiful if He had not been born from mother Yaśodā's womb? But because Kanhaiyā was somewhat darker than His mother, the boys teased Him about it. This place, which treasures this pastime, can still be seen today.

Cintāharaṇa Ghāṭa

This place lies on the bank of Śrī Yamunājī near Brahmāṇḍa Ghāṭa to its east. Cintāharaṇa Mahādeva, who is worshipped by the Brajabāsīs, is present here. When mother Yaśodā saw the *brahmāṇḍas* in Kanhaiyā's mouth, she became extremely anxious for His welfare and prayed to Cintāharaṇa Mahādeva for Kṛṣṇa's safety. *Cintā-haraṇa* means 'to remove anxieties'.

Kole Ghāṭa

This place is situated across the Yamunā from Brahmāṇḍa Ghāṭa, towards Mathurā. Śrī Vasudeva, along with the newborn baby Kṛṣṇa, crossed the Yamunā here on his way to Nanda Bhavan in Gokula. When he was half way across, the Yamunā rose up so that she could touch Śrī Kṛṣṇa's feet. Vasudeva held Kṛṣṇa higher. When the water reached Vasudeva's neck, he became perplexed and anxious for the child's protection. He cried out, *Ko leve?* ("Who will save Him?"). Vajranābha therefore named this *ghāṭa* Kole Ghāṭa, which is derived from the phrase '*ko leve*'.

Seeing the level of the Yamunā rise, Bāla Kṛṣṇa touched Yamunā-devī's lap (*kola*) with His lotus feet, and at once the Yamunā's waters began to recede. The Yamunā's shifting waters created an island, which became the location of Kole Gaon.

Uthaleśvara and Pāṇḍeśvara Mahādeva are situated on the bank of Kole Ghāṭa.

Devanagara

This is the place of residence of Devasppati Gopa and is situated about ten miles north of Dāūjī. Places of *darśana* are Rāmasāgara Kuṇḍa, an ancient and large *kadamba* tree, and the *govardhana-śila* worshipped by Devasppati Gopa. Nanda Rāya's *baiṭhaka* is in the village of Hātaurā near Dāūjī.

Karṇa-chedana sthāna (the place where ears were pierced)

The *karṇa-chedana saṁskāra*, or ear-piercing ceremony, of Bāla Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma took place here. This village is currently known as Karṇāvala. One can have *darśana* of Karṇabedha Kūpa, Ratnacauka, and of the deities of Śrī Madana-Mohana and Mādhavarāyājī here.

Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu in Mahāvana

Before Śrī Rūpa and Śrī Sanātana's arrival in Braja, Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu came to Braja and wandered throughout its forests. At the place of Kṛṣṇa's birth festival in Mahāvana, Mahāprabhu took *darśana* of Śrī Madana-Mohanājī and, overwhelmed with *prema*, began to dance as streams of tears flowed

from His eyes. Śrīman Mahāprabhu's *darśana* of Kṛṣṇa's birthplace has been described in *Bhakti-ratnākara*.⁵

Gokula

Mahāvana and Gokula are in fact one and the same place. Nanda Bābā along with his family members journeyed from Nandagaon to Bṛhadvana, or Mahāvana, where they settled down. Mahāvana is called Gokula because *go* (cows), *gopas*, *gopīs* and so forth resided here. At the time of Nanda Bābā, Gokula was not a separate village or town. In fact, the current village of Gokula is a recent settlement. Nanda Bābā's *gośālā* was in Gokula.

About five hundred years ago, after Śrī Caitanya Mahā-prabhu's arrival in Braja, Śrī Vallabhācārya sat on this beautiful bank beside the Yamunā and read *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* from beginning to end. Śrī Vallabhācārya's son, Śrī Viṭṭhalācārya, and his son, Śrī Gokulanātha, also have *baiṭhakas* here. In fact, Śrī Viṭṭhalācārya leased this place in his own name after showing Aurangzeb a miracle. It was actually he who founded Gokula. After them, the son of Śrī Gokulanātha resided here together with his family members. The *gosvāmīs* of the dynasty of Śrī Vallabha only lived in Gokula, where they established the deities of Mathureśajī, Viṭṭhalanāthajī, Dvārikādhiśajī, Gokulacandramājī, Bāla-Kṛṣṇajī and Śrī Madana-Mohanajī. Later, Śrī Mathureśa went to Koṭā, Śrī Viṭṭhalanātha to Nāthadvārā, Śrī Dvārakā-dhīśa to Kāṅkraulī, Gokulacandramā to Kāmavana, Śrī Bāla-Kṛṣṇa to Sūrata and Madana-Mohanajī to Kāmavana. Since the *gosvāmīs* in the dynasty of Śrī Vallabha reside in Gokula, they are well known as *gokuliyā gosvāmīs*.

Śrī Ṭhākuraṇī Ghāṭa

This is the main *ghāṭa* in Gokula and the place where Śrī Vallabhācārya received *darśana* of Śrī Yamunā Mahārānī. He began to give *dīkṣā* at this place. This *ghāṭa* is thus a place of great significance to the Vaiṣṇavas of the Vallabha Sam-pradāya.

Govinda Ghāṭa

When Śrī Vallabhācārya came to Braja, he took *darśana* of this *ghāṭa* on Yamunājī, finding it extremely attractive. He heard from the respectable elderly Brajabāsīs about Nanda Bābā's *gośālā* nearby. They informed him that the *ghāṭa* where he was sitting was well known by the name of Govinda Ghāṭa. Śrī Vallabhācārya became so delighted that he performed a *Bhāgavata Saptāha* under the *śamī* tree here.

Other places of *darśana* in Gokula include the garden of Gokulanātha, Bājanaṭilā, Simhapauḍī, Yaśodā Ghāṭa, the nearby temple of Śrī Viṭṭhalanātha, Śrī Madana-Mohanajī Mandira, Śrī Mādhavarāya Mandira, Śrī Gokulanātha Mandira, Śrī Navanītapriya Mandira, Śrī Dvārakānātha Mandira, the nearby *brahmachokra* tree, Śrī Gokulacandramā Mandira, Śrī Mathurānātha Mandira, the place where Śrī Nanda Mahārāja kept his cart, and so forth.

In the village of Naurāṅgabāda, which lies across the Yamunā facing Gokula, are Śrī Gaṅgājī Mandira and other places of *darśana*.

Akrūra Ghāṭa

Akrūra Ghāṭa is situated four miles north of Mathurā and one mile south of Vṛndāvana. Nearby is Akrūra Gaon.

Seated on Akrūra's chariot were Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Baladeva, whom Akrūra was bringing from Nandagrāma to Mathurā. Akrūra stopped the chariot at this place and left Kṛṣṇa and Baladeva on it, while he went alone to take bath in Yamunā Hrada and perform *sandhyā āhnikā*. He remained in the water to remember the *mantra* of his worshipable Lord, Sanātana Brahma (the four-armed Viṣṇu). On this day, however, instead of having *darśana* of his worshipful Sanātana Brahma in his meditation, he had the *darśana* of Śrī Rāma and Kṛṣṇa. Akrūra became confused. Looking toward the chariot, he saw Śrī Rāma and Kṛṣṇa sitting there. Again he dipped in the water and saw them there also. He now had full confidence that Śrī Rāma and Kṛṣṇa truly are the complete Sanātana Brahma.

The Gauḍīya Gosvāmīs have explained the incident of Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma's departure from Braja with an excellent *siddhānta*. Nandanandana Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Rohiṇī-nandana Śrī Rāma never leave Vṛndāvana to go elsewhere. Therefore, Nandanandana Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Rohiṇīnandana Śrī Rāma only came with Akrūra as far as Akrūra Ghāṭa, which marks the borderline between Mathurā and Vṛndāvana. Thereafter, They both remained in Vṛndāvana in Their *aprakāṣa* forms. So, who was it that travelled from Akrūra Ghāṭa to Mathurā on the chariot with Akrūra and performed pastimes there? It was Devakī-nandana or Vasudeva-nandana Śrī Balarāma and Devakī-nandana or Vasudeva-nandana Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

According to *tattva*, Yaśodā-nandana and Devakī-nandana are actually one, but from the viewpoint of *rasa* there is a difference between Them.

Once, Nanda Bābā was performing *nirjala* Ekādaśī when, that same night, Dvādaśī began. During the night, Nanda Bābā entered the water of the Yamunā to take bath and, because he was bathing at a demoniac time the servants of Varuṇadeva captured him and brought him to Varuṇa-loka. Shortly after, Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa also went to Varuṇa-loka. Śrī Varuṇadeva worshipped the Supreme Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa with gifts, and handed over Śrī Nanda Bābā to Him with honour.

This incident surprised Śrī Nanda Bābā, who narrated it to the Brajabāsīs the next day. The Brajabāsīs requested Śrī Kṛṣṇa to give them *darśana* of His *parama dhāma*, or supreme abode. At the same place where the most merciful Bhagavān later gave Akrūra *darśana* of his *iṣṭadeva*, He now gave the Brajabāsīs *darśana* of His eternal Brahma-loka. *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (10.28.14, 16) describes this as follows:

*iti saścintya bhagavān / mahā-kārūṇiko hariḥ
darśayām āsa lokaṁ svaṁ / gopānām tamasaḥ param
te tu brahma-hṛdaṁ nītā / magnāḥ kṛṣṇena coddhṛtāḥ
dadṛśur brahmaṇo lokaṁ / yatrākṛūro'dhyagāt purā*

“Thus, deeply considering the situation, the all-merciful Bhagavān revealed to the cowherd men His abode, which is beyond material darkness. The cowherd men were brought by Śrī Kṛṣṇa to Brahma Hrada, made to submerge in the water, and then lifted up. From the same vantage point that Akrūra saw the spiritual world, the cowherd men saw Brahma-loka.”

Crores of *tīrthas* are present in Akrūra Ghāṭa. There is a sacred injunction to take a bath here at the time of a solar eclipse.⁶

When Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu came to Vṛndāvana via the Jhāḍīkhaṇḍa path, there was no village in Vṛndāvana, only a deep forest. At night, He resided at Akrūra Ghāṭa, and at dawn He would sit at Imlītalā Ghāṭa on the bank of the Yamunā in Vṛndāvana. Being overwhelmed with *prema*, Mahāprabhu would chant *harināma* there until the third *prahara* in the afternoon. An uninterrupted stream of tears flowed from His eyes, and *sudīpta aṣṭa-sāttvika vikāra*, brightly shining *aṣṭa-sāttvika* transformations, manifested on the limbs of His body. Śrī Balabhadra Bhaṭṭācārya was the only person with Him at that time. This pastime is described in *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta* in a way that melts the heart.

In ancient times, Śānta Ṛṣi performed a *yajña* for King Bṛhadsena here. Another name of Akrūra Ghāṭa is Brahma Hrada, because here Kṛṣṇa gave the *gopas darśana* of Brahma Dhāma. Akrūrajī also received *darśana* of the complete Sanātana Brahma here.

Yajña Sthala

Near Akrūra Ghāṭa is the sacrificial arena (*yajña-sthala*) of the Mathurā *brāhmaṇas*. Once, Śrī Kṛṣṇa and His cowherd friends were grazing the cows near Yajña Sthala. Feeling hungry, Kṛṣṇa sent the *sakhās* to beg for foodstuffs from the *brāhmaṇas* who were performing a *yajña* at this place. However, because they were engrossed in their *yajña*, those non-devotional *brāhmaṇas* refused to give them anything. The *sakhās* were insulted and returned to Kṛṣṇa, who told them to go and beg something from the wives of those *brāhmaṇas*.

Bhojana Sthala (Bhātrola Gaon)

Here, Kṛṣṇa relished various delicious cooked grains and foodstuffs brought by the *yajña-patnīs*, the wives of the *brāhmaṇas*.

Having been persuaded by Kṛṣṇa, the cowherd boys had gone to the residence of the *yajña patnīs* and begged for some foodstuffs for Kṛṣṇa and Baladeva. Simply upon hearing the names of Rāma and Kṛṣṇa, the *yajña-patnīs* became over-whelmed with *bhāva*. They left their homes to have *darśana* of Kṛṣṇa, eagerly bringing various delicious cooked foodstuffs on large plates. Nothing could stop them, not even the objections of their husbands. Some *yājñika brāhmaṇas* forcefully locked their wives in their houses, but these women gave up their bodies in the fire of separation and went to meet Kṛṣṇa. When the *brāhmaṇīs* approached Śrī Kṛṣṇa, they became enchanted upon seeing His dark-complexioned form, which

resembles a fresh rain cloud. The yellow garments on His *śyāma*-complexioned limbs wavered like steady lightening.

Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam (10.23.22) relates:

*śyāmaṁ hiraṇya-paridhiṁ vanamālya-barha-
dhātu-pravāla-naṭa-veṣam anuvratāmse
vinyasta-hastam itareṇa dhunānam abjaṁ
karṇotpalālaka-kapola-mukhābja-hāsam*

“His complexion was dark blue and His garment golden. Wearing a peacock feather, coloured minerals, sprigs of flower buds and a garland of forest flowers and leaves, He was dressed just like a dramatic dancer. He rested one hand upon the shoulder of a friend and with the other twirled a lotus. Lilies graced His ears, His hair hung down over His cheeks, and His lotus face was smiling.”

The wives of the *brāhmaṇas* became so overwhelmed with *prema* upon seeing Kṛṣṇa that they did not want to return home to their husbands. After Kṛṣṇa instructed them to go, however, they somehow readied themselves to do so. Upon returning home, they found that the attitude of their husbands had entirely changed. The *brāhmaṇas* now began to praise their wives’ transcendental devotion to Kṛṣṇa, and they condemned their three types of birth – namely seminal, *brahminical* and sacrificial – and their knowledge and expertise in Vedic rituals.⁷

There is a point to be considered here. Kṛṣṇa told these *dvija-patnīs* to return home, and they obeyed Him. When the *gopa-ramaṇīs* heard the sound of Kṛṣṇa’s flute, they came to Kṛṣṇa, and He similarly told them to return to their husbands. They did not return, however, and Kṛṣṇa danced and performed *rāsa-līlā* with them. How is this? The answer is that only the *gopīs* have the *adhikāra* to participate in Kṛṣṇa’s *rāsa-līlā* and other such pastimes. In Braja, Śrī Kṛṣṇa wears *gopaveśa*, or the dress of a *gopa*, and He is *gopāveśa*, or absorbed in the mood of a *gopa*. Therefore, only the *gopīs* who themselves took birth from the wombs of *gopīs* have the *adhikāra* to participate in Brajendra-nandana Śrī Kṛṣṇa’s *rāsa* and other *nikuṣja-līlās*. Lakṣmī from Vaikuṇṭha and the *dvija-patnīs* have no qualification to enter these confidential *līlās*. They were therefore sent away. It may be that after performing arduous worship for many lifetimes under the guidance of the *rāgātmikā gopīs*, such personalities may one day take a birth from the wombs of *gopīs* in *prakaṭa* Braja. Then, by the influence of their association with *nitya-siddha gopīs*, they may one day become qualified for *sevā* in the *nikuṣjas* and so forth.

Chapter 19

Śrī Vṛndāvana

This supremely charming forest called Vṛndāvana is expertly served by Śrī Vṛndā-devī and is densely filled with many types of *sevā-kuṣjas* and *keli-kuṣjas*. Vṛndā-devī, eternally reigning and residing here, is the protector, nourisher and forest goddess (*vanadevī*) of Śrī Vṛndāvana. All the trees,

creepers, birds and animals of Vṛndāvana are under her jurisdiction, and they are dependent upon and obedient to her. She constantly engages countless *gopīs* in service in the *kuṣjas*. She is therefore the *adhiṣṭhātrī-devī* of *kuṣja-sevā*.

It is important to understand Yogamāyā (*samaṣṭibhūtā svarūpa-śakti*), Paurṇamāsī (*parākhyā mahā-śakti*) and Vṛndā-devī and their different functions. Bhagavatī Paurṇamāsī is the *līlā-avatāra* of Yogamāyā; in other words, when Yoga-māyā takes a tangible form, she becomes Paurṇamāsī. Paurṇamāsī's function is to attend to all the details of the various pastimes in the forests and *goṣṭhas*. Vṛndā-devī, on the other hand, who is the personification of Śrī Kṛṣṇa's *līlākhyā mahā-śakti* and also a manifestation of Yogamāyā, makes all the arrangements for Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa's *nikuṣja-vilāsa*, *rāsa-vilāsa* and so on.

Vṛndā-devī's father is Candrabhānu, her mother is Phullarā Gopī and her husband is Mahīpāla. All of them eternally reside in Vṛndāvana. Vṛndā is the most important among all the *dūtī sakhīs*, or messengers, like Vṛndārikā, Mainā and Muralī. Her function is to skilfully arrange the meeting of the Divine Couple through various means and, therefore, she is the *vanadevī* of Vṛndāvana. Vṛndā-devī has dedicated her kingdom of Vṛndāvana, which she wonder-fully serves, protects and nourishes, at the lotus feet of Vṛṣabhānu-nandinī Śrīmatī Rādhikā, who is *mahābhāva svarūpā*, the embodiment of *mahābhāva*. Therefore, Śrīmatī Rādhikā is truly Vṛndāvaneśvarī, the Queen of Vṛndāvana.

The *Purāṇas* state that the following personalities are all *kāya-vyūhā svarūpā*, bodily expansions, of *sarva-śaktimayī* Śrīmatī Rādhikā: Mahārāja Kedāra's daughter who is de-scribed as Vṛndā-devī; king Kuśadhvaja's daughter whom the *Brahma-vaivarta Purāṇa* describes as Tulasī, the wife of Śaṅkhacūḍa; and Vṛndā, or Tulasī, the beloved of Hari who appears in the form of a plant on the earth planet. They eternally reside in Vṛndāvana and are the partial manifes-tations (*kalā-svarūpā*) of Vṛndā-devī, who is always engaged in the service of the Divine Couple in the *nikuṣjas* of Vṛndāvana. Indeed, Vṛndāvana is known by the name of this Vṛndā-devī.

Descriptions of the abundant glories of Śrī Vṛndāvana are found throughout *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, which is the crown-jewel of all *pramāṇas* (evidences). Śrī Nanda Bābā's minister and elder brother Śrī Upānanda says:

*vanam vṛndāvanam nāma
paśavyam nava-kānanam
gopa-gopī-gavam sevyam
puṇyādri-tṛṇa-vīrudham*

(*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 10.11.28)

“We should not stay in this Gokula-Mahāvana which is constantly in turmoil. As *gopas* and *gopīs*, our prime duty is to immediately take up residence in Vṛndāvana, whose charm is unrivalled, being enchanting in every respect. It is covered with lush grass, beautified with various trees, creep-ers and

sacred mountains, and protected in all respects to provide safety to cows and other animals.”

Upon observing the wonderful, sweet pastimes of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, Caturmukha Brahmā became very astonished and prayed with folded hands:

*tad bhūri-bhāgyam iha janma kim apy aṭavyām
yad gokule 'pi katamāṅghri-rajo-'bhiṣekam
yaj-jīvitam tu nikhilam bhagavān mukundas
tv adyāpi yat-pada-rajah śruti-mṛgyam eva
(Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 10.14.34)*

“Aho! It would be my great fortune to take birth as a blade of grass, a shrub or any other species which can be anointed with the dust falling from the lotus feet of any of the Brajabāsīs of Vṛndāvana. Even the *śrutis*, who have been searching for so long, have not yet received the dust of the lotus feet of Bhagavān Mukunda, who is the life and soul of these Brajabāsīs. If it is impossible for me to take birth in any species in Vṛndāvana, then let me take birth even as a rock on the border of Nanda-Gokula. The ladies who sweep the streets will then rub their feet on this rock to clean them, and by this I will receive the good fortune of touching the dust of their feet.”

Uddhava, the *premātura bhakta*, prays:

*āsām aho caraṇa-reṇu-juṣām aham syām
vṛndāvane kim api gulma-latauṣadhīnām
yā dustyajam sva-janam ārya-patham ca hitvā
bhejur mukunda-padavīm śrutibhir vimṛgyām
(Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 10.47.61)*

“I would consider it my greatest fortune (*aho bhagya*) to take birth as a shrub, creeper, or any other plant in this Vṛndā-vana and thus be sprinkled by the footdust of these *gopīs*. They have given up everything, including their husbands, sons and other family members, the path of chastity (*ārya-dharma*), and their honour in society (*loka-lajjā*), which are all very difficult to renounce. Thus their *prema* has enchanted even Svayaṁ Bhagavān Brajendra-nandana Śrī Kṛṣṇa, who is searched for by the *śrutis*.”

The beautiful young women of Mathurā present in Kāmsa’s wrestling arena lavishly praised Vṛndāvana by saying:

*puṇyā bata vraja-bhuvo yad ayam nṛ-liṅga
gūḍhaḥ purāṇa-puruṣo vana-citra-mālyah
gāḥ pālayan saha-balah kvaṇayamś ca veṇuṁ
vikṛīḍayāṣcati giritra-ramārcitāṅghriḥ
(Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 10.44.13)*

“Aho! In all three worlds, only Śrī Vṛndāvana and the *gopa-ramaṇīs* living in Vṛndāvana are fortunate, because in that place the *parama purāṇa-puruṣa* Śrī Kṛṣṇa, disguised as a human being, performs human-like pastimes under the arrangement of Yogamāyā. Adorned with a multi-coloured *vana-mālā*, He

grazes the cows with Baladeva and the *sakhās*, vibrating His sweet flute and absorbed in various kinds of *krīḍā-vilāsa*."

Being intoxicated by *kṛṣṇa-prema*, one *gopī* addresses another *gopī*, saying:

*vṛndāvanam sakhi bhuvo vitanoti kīrtim
yad devakī-suta-padāmbuja-labdha-lakṣmi
govinda-veṇum anu matta-mayūra-nṛtyam
preksyādri-sānv-avaratānya-samasta-sattvam
(Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 10.21.10)*

"O *sakhī*, this Vṛndāvana is spreading the fame of the Earth planet even above that of Vaikuṇṭha because it is splendidly decorated by the marks of the lotus feet of Yaśodā-nandana Śrī Kṛṣṇa. *Sakhī*, when *rasikendra* Śrī Kṛṣṇa plays on His *muralī*, which enchants the whole world, the peacocks become intoxicated and, thinking the sound of the flute to be the roaring thunder of the clouds, spread their tail feathers and begin to dance. Seeing this, the birds and animals roaming on the mountain summits become completely stunned and relish the sound of the flute with their ears and the dance of the peacocks with their eyes."

What to speak of others, even *parama-rasika* and *bhavuka* Śukadeva Gosvāmī is mesmerised by Vṛndāvana, and thus praises this land repeatedly:

*barhāpīḍam naṭa-vara-vapuḥ karṇayoḥ karṇikāram
bibhrad vāsaḥ kanaka-kapīśam vajjayantīm ca mālām
randhrān veṇor adhara-sudhayāpūrayan gopa-vṛndair
vṛndāraṇyam sva-pada ramaṇam prāviśad gīta-kīrtiḥ
(Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 10.21.5)*

"Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the enchanter of the whole world, dressed as a *naṭavara*, the best of dancers, entered the supremely charm-ing Vṛndāvana, beautifying it with the marks of His lotus feet. His head was decorated with a peacock feather. He wore fragrant yellow *karnikara* flowers behind His ears, a radiant golden garment on His *śyāma*-complexioned limbs, and around His neck a *vana-mālā* made of five different coloured flowers, that extended down to His lotus feet. He poured the nectar from His lips through the holes of His flute, enchanting everyone by its sweet sound, including both moveable and immovable entities. The cowherd boys followed Him, singing His glories."

Śrī Kṛṣṇa never leaves this sweet Vṛndāvana, which is inundated with *akhila cidānanda rasa* - *vṛndāvanam parityajya pādamekam na gacchati* (*Brahma-yāmala*).

One poet who was a *rasika bhakta* extracted the essence of the *śrutis* and *Purāṇas* in regard to Vṛndāvana. As if putting the vast ocean into a water pot, he summed it up accurately by saying:

*braj samudr mathurā kamal vṛndāvan makarand
braj vanitā sab puṣp haiṁ madhukar gokulcand*

“Braja is like the ocean, Mathurā like the lotus, and Vṛndā-vana like the nectar-pollen. All the Braja *gopīs* are like flowers, and Gokulacanda Kṛṣṇa is the bumblebee.”

The Unique Glory of Śrī Vṛndāvana

Śrī Vṛndāvana is not merely a *tīrtha*, but is Bhagavān’s own abode (*dhāma*), or His own home. It is no exaggeration to say that Vṛndāvana is Kṛṣṇa’s *svaṛūpa* because Kṛṣṇa and His *dhāma* are non-different.

According to the *Purāṇas*, Devarṣi Nārada was once sing-ing the glories of Śrī Hari on his *vīṇa* when he reached Prayāga. This Prayāga is Tīrtharāja, or the king of all holy places. Prayāga welcomed him with great honour and narrated the story of how he became Tīrtharāja. Śrī Nārada said, “Bhagavān has given you the post of Tīrtharāja, but I have some doubt in this regard. Does Vṛndāvana ever come to make offerings to you along with the other *tīrthas*?” Tīrtharāja replied, “No.”

Śrī Nārada asked, “Then, what kind of Tīrtharāja are you?”

This statement pierced the heart of Tīrtharāja, who understood it to be true. “How then am I Tīrtharāja?” he wondered. Thinking in this way, he went to Bhagavān.

Seeing Tīrtharāja approaching, Bhagavān honoured him appropriately and asked him why he had come. Tīrtharāja humbly replied, “Prabhu, You have appointed me as Tīrtha-rāja, but the *tīrtha* of Vṛndāvana never comes to make any offering to me. How can it be that I am Tīrtharāja? If a small *tīrtha* like Vṛndāvana does not accept my jurisdiction, then it is not at all appropriate for me to hold the title of Tīrtharāja.”

Upon hearing the statements of Prayāga Rāja, Bhagavān became silent for a moment. His eyes brimmed with tears as He remembered Braja. Cow-grazing, His *sakhās*, Nanda Bābā and mother Yaśodā’s affection, His beloved Kīśorī Śrī Rādhā, the *gopīs* and His *rāsa-vilāsa* – these memories appeared in His heart along with many others from Braja. Bhagavān’s heart melted. After composing Himself a little, He spoke very gravely. “Tīrtharāja! It is true that I have appointed you the king of all *tīrthas*, but I have not made you the king of My own home, Śrī Vṛndāvana. The land of Vṛndāvana is not only My home, but is the supreme place of My beloved Śrī Rādhā’s pastimes (*vihāra*). She is indeed the *adhipati* (mistress) and *īśvarī* (sovereign) there. She is truly Vṛndāvaneśvarī. I also reside there eternally. You are Tīrtharāja, no doubt, but Vṛndāvana is not merely a *tīrtha*. You too can worship and serve Vṛndāvana in some way.”

Śrī Nārada has glorified Śrī Vṛndāvana not only in the *Padma Purāṇa*, but also to Bhakti-devī in *Śrīmad-Bhāgavat Māhātmya* (1.61):

*vṛndāvanasya saṁyogāt / punastvaṁ taruṇī navā
dhanyaṁ vṛndāvanam tena / bhaktir-nṛtyati yatra ca*

“He Devī! By coming to Vṛndāvana, you have again become a fresh young woman. Thus, this Vṛndāvana Dhāma, where *bhakti* is dancing everywhere,

is blessed.” The glories of Śrī Vṛndāvana are also mentioned in the *Mathurā Khaṇḍa* of the *Skanda Purāṇa*¹ and in the *Ādi Varāha Purāṇa*.²

Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu’s Unparalleled Gift: Śrī Vṛndāvana

It has already been mentioned that when Kṛṣṇa’s *līlās* became unmanifest, all the pastime-places in Braja almost disappeared. Śrī Vṛndāvana, along with its *rāsa-sthalī* and Vamśīvaṭa, became dense forest and disappeared from sight. After some years, Śrī Vajranābha Mahārāja manifested the various pastime-places of Braja with the help of Śāṇḍilya, Bhāgurī Ṛṣi and others. They did this by establishing temples, *sarovaras*, *kuṇḍas* and so forth. About four and a half thousand years later, however, these places had again vanished. It was then that Śrī Kṛṣṇa appeared in this world as Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu, immersed in the *bhāva* of Śrīmatī Rādhikā. He manifested the lost pastime-places of Śrī Vṛndāvana and Braja Maṇḍala, both directly Himself, and also through Śrī Rūpa, Śrī Sanātana and other associates. The whole universe, especially the community of Vaiṣṇavas, will eternally remain indebted to these personalities for this outstanding work. If they had not descended to this earth, who would now know about the sweetness of Vṛndāvana and who would be able to enter that sweetness? If Gaurāṅgadeva had not come, then who would have described the glories of Śrīmatī Rādhikā and the topmost limit of *prema-rasa*? In ‘Yadi Gaurāṅga Nahito’, Narahari dāsa sings with great feeling:

(yadi) gaurāṅga nahito, tabe ki hoito
kemone dharita de?
rādhāra mahimā, prema-rasa-sīmā
jagate jānāto ke?
madhura vṛndā, vipina-mādhurī
praveśa cāturī sār
baraja-yuvati, bhāvera bhakati,
śakati hoito kār?

“If Śrīman Gaurāṅga Mahāprabhu had not appeared, then what would have become of us? How could we have tolerated living? In this universe, who would ever have come to know about the glories of Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī and the topmost limit of *prema-rasa*? If Caitanya Mahāprabhu had not come, who would have had the intelligence to join the sweet *madhura rasa* of Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa’s *līlās* in Vṛndāvana? Who else but Mahāprabhu could have bestowed the power to enter the *braja ramaṇīs*’ loving mood of *sevā* to Yugala Kīśora?” Upon the direct order of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu, Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava *ācāryas* manifested the pastime-places of Braja. Taking the help of various *śāstras*, Śrī Lokanātha Gosvāmī, Śrī Bhūgarbha Gosvāmī, Śrī Sanātana Gosvāmī, Śrī Rūpa Gosvāmī, Śrī Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmī, Śrī Raghunātha Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmī, Śrī Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī, Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī and others manifested these places through their untiring endeavours.

The Pastime-places of Śrī Vṛndāvana

Bhagavatī Yamunā

Mahārānī Yamunā is *śrī kṛṣṇa-svarūpinī*, meaning that she is a manifestation of Viśākhā. She is Bhagavatī because she is dear to Kṛṣṇa, and she is Kṛṣṇā because she is blackish in complexion. Yamunā-devī assists the amorous pastimes (*keli-vilāsa*) of Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa Yugala in every respect, and flows on three sides of Vṛndāvana. To fully support the *rasa-vilāsa* of Priyā and Priyatama, she creates countless charming *nikuṣjas*, dense with various kinds of trees and creepers that are laden with flowers and fruits.

She is ornamented and beautified with divine *ghāṭas* bedecked with jewels, with *kadamba*, *tamāla*, *āmra*, *bakula* and other types of trees, and with various *kuṣjas*. Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa Yugala perform water pastimes (*jal-keli*) and boating pastimes (*naukā-vihāra*) with the *sakhīs* in the waters of Śrī Yamunā. This water is saturated with *prema* and is always decorated with seven-petalled lotuses (*sapta-dala kamala*). This Bhagavatī Yamunā, who serves Yugala Kīśora eternally, is supremely worshipable.

The *Śrī Yamunā-praṇāma* (verse one) in *Padma Purāṇa* glorifies her as follows:

*cidānanda-bhānoḥ sadā nanda-sūnoḥ
para-prema-pātrī drava-brahma-gātrī
aghānām lavitrī jagat-kṣema-dhātrī
pavitri-kriyānno vapur-mitra-putrī*

“I repeatedly offer prayers to Śrī Yamunā, the daughter of the Sungod, who is the bestower of *unnatojjvala prema* for *cidānanda-sūrya-svarūpa* Nandanandana Śrī Kṛṣṇa. She embodies transcendental bliss and directly personifies the melted form of Parabrahma. Simply remembering her destroys all types of wickedness and great sins, thus rendering the heart pure. She bestows all auspiciousness upon the world, and can even infuse *braja-rasa* into dry, desert-like hearts. May she purify us.”

*gaṅgādi-tīrtha-pariṣevita-pāda-padmām
goloka-saukhya-rasa-pūramahim mahimnā
āplāvitākhila-sudhāsu-jalām sukhābdhau
rādhā-mukunda-muditām yamunām namāmi*

(*Padma Purāṇa, Śrī Yamunā-praṇāma*)

“I offer *praṇāmas* time and again unto *kṛṣṇa-priyā* Śrī Yamunā, whose lotus feet are always served by Gaṅgā, Godāvarī, Narmadā, Sindhu and other *tīrthas*. Śrī Yamunā is glorious due to being the bestower of *sevā* that is saturated with *rasa* to Śrī Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa Yugala in Goloka-Vṛndāvana. In her nectar-filled waters, Śrī Rādhā-Mukunda remain immersed in an ocean of happiness.”

Sonaraka

This place is close to the present day Kālīya Daha. Saubhari Ṛṣi's *āśrama* was here. Before the time of *kṛṣṇa-līlā*, Saubhari Ṛṣi performed austerities here for thousands of years. To conquer his senses, he remained standing in

the water of the Yamunā during all seasons, including summer and winter. One day Garuḍa, a *parikara* of Bhagavān, arrived here. Following his nature as a bird, he swallowed a big male fish right before everyone's eyes. Seeing this, the fish community lamented and prayed to Saubhari Ṛṣi for retaliation. Engrossed in dry austerities and unaware of the glories of Bhagavān's devotees, Saubhari Ṛṣi cursed Garuḍa, saying that if he came here again, his head would be cut off. Because Saubhari Ṛṣi had cursed a great devotee, a desire arose in his heart to enjoy the material world. He came out of the waters of the Yamunā, and by his mystic power transformed himself into a young man. He married the many beautiful young daughters of Mahārāja Māndhātā, and remained entangled in worldly pleasures for thousands of years.

By the desire of Bhagavān, the Kālīya serpent later moved to that same Yamunā pond with his family, in order to protect himself from the very powerful Garuḍa. This rendered the water in the pond poisonous, and all the fish living here, who had also committed an offence towards Garuḍa, died. In this way, Saubhari Ṛṣi and all the fish that had taken shelter of him faced total destruction, because they had committed an offence towards a *bhakta*. The *śāstras* therefore declare that one should at all costs always refrain from committing Vaiṣṇava *aparādha*.

Kālīya Hrada (Kālīya Daha)

Hrada means 'lake', and *daha* is the spot where the water of a river runs deep. The current name of this place is Kālīya Daha. Śrī Kṛṣṇa subdued the serpent Kālīya here. The *keli-kadamba* tree from which Śrī Kṛṣṇa jumped with great speed into the Kālīya Hrada stands nearby. All of the trees and creepers around the *hrada* were burnt to ashes by the poison of the Kālīya serpent. Only this one *keli-kadamba* tree remained. This was because the mighty and valiant Garuḍa was once carrying a pot of *amṛta* from the heavenly planets in order to free his mother Vinatā from the slavery of his stepmother Kadrū. He rested on this *keli-kadamba* tree for some time, and the strength of the nectar's fragrance, or a drop of the nectar itself that had spilled, was enough to save this *keli-kadamba* tree.

Kālīya Nāga was also very valiant and powerful. When he tied Kṛṣṇa in his coils, Kṛṣṇa became somewhat helpless and motionless. At that time, the Nāgapatnīs, who were great *bhaktas* of Kṛṣṇa, began to pray, "We would rather be widows than be the wives of a husband opposed to Bhagavān." But when Kṛṣṇa freed Himself from the serpent's coils and began to dance on and kick Kālīya's hoods, Kālīya vomited blood from his thousands of mouths and surrendered unto Bhagavān. At that time, the Nāgapatnīs folded their hands and begged Kṛṣṇa to spare their husband's life, considering his surrendered mood. Their prayers pleased Śrī Kṛṣṇa. He granted Kālīya Nāga freedom from fear and ordered him to go to Ramanāka Dvīpa with his family. He assured Kālīya of His protection, saying, "You need no longer fear

Garuḍa. When he sees My footprints on your hoods, he will forget his enmity towards you.”

The Nāgapatnīs prayed as follows:

*kasyānubhāvo 'sya na deva vidmahe
tavāṅghri-reṇu-sparsādhikāraḥ
yad-vāṣchayā śrīr lalanācarat tapo
vihāya kāmān su-ciraṁ dhṛta-vratā
(Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 10.16.36)*

“He Deva! Śrī Lakṣmī-devī gave up all her desires, took a *vrata* and performed austerities for a long, long time just to attain the dust of Your lotus feet. However, she nonetheless failed to achieve her heart’s desire. Who knows what pious deed Kālīya Nāga performed to become qualified to receive that same rare footdust.”

The sole reason why Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa bestowed His causeless mercy upon Kālīya was the spontaneous unmo-tivated devotion (*ahaitukī-bhakti*) that Kālīya Nāga’s wives had for Him. Bhagavān’s mercy follows and is obedient to the mercy of the *bhakta*. The Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava commen-tators on this *śloka* explain this beautifully.

Śrī Prabodhānanda Sarasvatī’s bhajana-kuṭīra & samādhī

Śrī Prabodhānanda Sarasvatī is the author of *Rādhā-rasa-sudhā-nidhi*, *Vṛndāvana Mahimāmṛta*, *Śrī Caitanya-candrāmṛta*, *Śaṅgīta-mādhava* and other scriptures. In his earlier life, Prabodhānanda Sarasvatī was a resident of Śrī Raṅgam and a devotee of Śrī Lakṣmī-Nārāyaṇa. He was the paternal uncle and *guru* of the famous Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmī. However, by the mercy of Śrīman Mahāprabhu, he became intoxicated with the *rasa* of Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa Yugala. Shortly after Śrīman Mahāprabhu left Śrī Raṅgam, he went to Vṛndāvana to perform *bhajana*. He also stayed in Kāmyavana for some time. At the end of his life he entered *samādhī* here while perform-ing *bhajana*. In *kṛṣṇa-līlā*, he is Tuṅgavidyā Sakhī.

Nowadays, some people say that Prabodhānanda Sarasvatī and the *advaitavādī* Prakāśānanda Sarasvatī of Kāśī are one and the same person. This is completely incorrect in every respect. How is it possible for the same person to first be the *bhakta* Prabodhānanda Sarasvatī, then the *māyāvādī* Prakāśānanda and then the same Prabodhānanda Sarasvatī once again? This modern doctrine is an ignorant, mind-boggling thought and has been completely refuted by the Śrī Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava *ācāryas*.

Dvādaśāditya Tīlā

It was winter when Kṛṣṇa subdued Kālīya. Kṛṣṇa, who was performing His *nara-līlā*, came out of the water, appearing to be very cold. He climbed upon a nearby small hill and basked in the heat of the sun. To serve Kṛṣṇa, the devotee Sūrya-deva removed His shivering by shining forth the full scorching heat of the complete sun (*dvādaśa kalā*), as it appears at the time of the

dissolution of the universe. This place is therefore known as Dvādaśāditya Tīlā.

Praskandana Kṣetra

The sun's heat removed Kṛṣṇa's shivering, but this heat was excessive and Kṛṣṇa started to perspire. The name of this place thus became Praskandana Tīrtha; the word *praskan-dana* means 'with perspiration'.

Advaita Vaṭa

Advaita Vaṭa is situated directly in Praskandana Tīrtha. Just before the advent of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu, Śrī Advaita Ācārya came to this place while wandering throughout Braja. He resided under this same *vaṭa* tree for several days. He had found Śrī Madana-Gopāla in Mahāvana-Gokula, and now served Him here. Due to fear of the *yavanas* (Muslims), and by His desire, He secretly left Śrī Madana-Gopāla with a devoted *caube brāhmaṇa* and went to Śāntipura, knowing that very soon Śacīnandana Śrī Gaurahari would appear in the town of Nadiyā.

Later, that same Madana-Gopāla made His way to Sanātana Gosvāmī, who had a large temple constructed just nearby and established Him in it. Since then, Śrī Madana-Gopāla became known as Śrī Madana-Mohana.

Dāna Galī, Māna Galī, Gumāna Galī & Kuṣja Galī

Just near the famous Sevā Kuṣja are four narrow *galīs*, or alleys: Dāna Galī, Māna Galī, Gumāna Galī and Kuṣja Galī. Once, when Śrīmatī Rādhikā was in *māna*, She made Her way to Māna Sarovara via this very Māna Galī. In the narrow alley named Dāna Galī, Śrī Kṛṣṇa and His *sakhās* asked the *gopīs* for *dāna*, or tax, in the form of *prema*, and the *gopīs* asked the same thing from Kṛṣṇa. This *galī* is there-fore known as Dāna Galī. Prema Galī is where Kīśora-Kīśorī-jī's first meeting took place. At that moment, by the mutual play of Their eyes, a relationship of *prema* was established between Them which increased moment by moment. That is why this *galī* has become known as Prema Galī. Some also call it Gumāna Galī, because when Kṛṣṇa asked Śrī Priyājī for *dāna*, exhibiting great pride (*gumāna*), She refused to give it. The *galī* down which the *sakhīs* would make their way to Sevā Kuṣja, where Śrī Kṛṣṇa would massage the feet of *svādhīna-bhartṛkā* Śrī Rādhā, is called Kuṣja Galī. Śrī Dāna-Bihārī and Śrī Rūpa-Sanātana Gauḍīya Maṭha are situated at the crossing of these four *galīs*.

Sevā Kuṣja

This place is also called Nikuṣjavana. It lies just near the temple of Śrī Rādhā-Dāmodara, to the south-west. A painting of Śrīmatī Rādhikā with Śrī Kṛṣṇa massaging Her feet is worshipped here in a small temple.

The Brajabāsīs say that even today Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa Yugala perform Their pastimes here every night. Everyone therefore leaves this *kuṣja* at dusk. Even the impudent monkeys independently leave this *kuṣja* as the evening

falls. It once happened that someone stubbornly tried to remain here during the night, and in the morning he was found dead. Others have by some means escaped death, but have become completely insane.

Bhakta Rasakhāna searched for Kṛṣṇa all over Braja but without success. Finally, he had *darśana* of *rasika* Śrī Kṛṣṇa at this very place. He has revealed this in his beautiful poetry (*padas*) as follows:

*dekhyo duryo vah kuṣj kuṭīr meṁ
baiṭhyo paloṭat rādhikā pāyan*

“Standing in the doorway of the *kuṣja*, I watch Kṛṣṇa as He sits massaging Rādhikā’s feet submissively.” (The word *paloṭa* here indicates that Kṛṣṇa is massaging in the mood, ‘I will not go to Candrāvalī’s *kuṣja* again.’)

In *Sevā Kuṣja*, we also find *Lalitā Kuṇḍa*. When *Lalitājī* was feeling thirsty during *rāsa*, Kṛṣṇa manifested this beautiful *kuṇḍa* by digging it with His *veṇu*. *Lalitā* and the *sakhīs* drank the *kuṇḍa*’s sweet, cool water and refreshed themselves. There is a *keli-kadamba* tree nearby whose every knot bulges out and resembles a round *śālagrāma*.

Śrī Rūpa-Sanātana Gauḍīya Maṭha (Śrī Vinoda Kuṣja)

This *maṭha* lies on *Dāna Galī*, very close to Śrī *Sevā Kuṣja*, the heart of Śrīdhāma Vṛndāvana, and has become a famous place for *darśana*.

Prema-puruṣottama Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu, the ocean of mercy, sent the brothers Śrī Rūpa Gosvāmī and Śrī Sanātana Gosvāmī to Śrī Vṛndāvana to (i) re-establish the lost places of pastimes in Śrī Vṛndāvana, (ii) establish *śrī vigraha*, (iii) compose literatures on *bhakti* and (iv) establish *vaiṣṇava-sadācāra*, or proper *vaiṣṇava* behaviour (*smṛti*). By the causeless mercy and encouragement of Śrīman Mahāprabhu, Śrī Rūpa and Śrī Sanātana Gosvāmīs established Śrī Govindadeva and Śrī Madana-Mohana, re-discovered lost *tīrthas*, and composed *vaiṣṇava-smṛti* and *bhakti* texts like *Bṛhad-bhāgavatāmṛta*, *Laghu-bhāgavatāmṛta*, *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*, *Ujjvala-nilamaṇi* and *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*.

To keep alive the memory of Śrī Rūpa Gosvāmī and Śrī Sanātana Gosvāmī, who fulfilled Śrīman Mahāprabhu’s *mano’bhiṣṭa*, or inner heart’s desire, Śrī Śrīmad Bhakti-vedānta Vāmana Mahārāja and the author (Śrī Śrīmad Bhaktivedānta Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja) established this *maṭha*. They did this under the inspiration of the founder of Śrī Gauḍīya Vedānta Samiti, *nitya-līlā praviṣṭa oṁ viṣṇupāda aṣṭottara-śata* Śrī Śrīmad Bhakti Prajñāna Keśava Gosvāmī Mahārāja, and under the direction of the members of Śrī Gauḍīya Vedānta Samiti.

The distinguishing feature of this *maṭha* is the presence of Śrī Vṛndā-devī in one of the three *prakoṣṭhas* (sections) of the altar. In the remaining two *prakoṣṭhas* are Śrī Gaura-sundara along with Śrī Śrī Rādhā-Vinoda Bihārījī and *gurupādapadma* Śrīla Bhakti Prajñāna Keśava Gosvāmī Mahārāja. At the present time, the only other prominent deity of Śrīmatī Vṛndā-devī can be found in Kāmyavana.

Imlītalā

At the time of *braja-līlā*, the ancient *imlī* (tamarind) tree that stood here was enormous. That tree has since disappeared, and a new *imlī* tree stands in its place.

Midway through *rāsa-līlā*, Śrī Kṛṣṇa disappeared in order to dispel the other *gopīs'* *saubhāgya-mada*, pride in their good fortune, and to embellish Priyājī's *māna*. (Kṛṣṇa did not try to break Priyājī's *māna*, but simply tried to give Her happiness by leaving the other *gopīs*.) He followed Priyājī to Śṛṅgāra Vata, where He began to decorate Her with flowers. At that time, the other *gopīs*, who were searching for Kṛṣṇa, came closer to the place where Rādhikā and Kṛṣṇa were. Śrī Kṛṣṇa requested Priyājī to leave with Him, but She said, "I am unable to walk. You can carry Me on Your shoulders." Kṛṣṇa squatted down, indicating that Priyājī should sit on His shoulders. Just as She went to do this, Kṛṣṇa disappeared again. Now, She also called out in separation, "*Hā Nātha! Hā Ramaṇa!*" and fell down unconscious. The other *gopīs* became very distressed to see Her in this condition.

Having left Śrīmatī Rādhikā, Śrī Kṛṣṇa began to feel deep separation from Her. Sitting under an *imlī* tree on the bank of the Yamunā, He became so absorbed in thinking of Her that His bodily lustre turned golden like Hers. In connection with this incident, *pāramārādhyā om viṣṇupāda Śrī Śrīmad Bhakti Prajñāna Keśava Gosvāmī Mahārāja* has presented a wonderful *śloka* that penetrates the heart:

*rādhā-cintā niveśeṇa / yasya kāntir vilopitā
śrī-kṛṣṇa-caraṇaṁ vande / rādhāliṅgita vigrahaṁ
(Śrī Śrī Rādhā Vinoda-bihārī Tattvāṣṭakam, text 1)*

"I worship the lotus feet of the form of Śrī Kṛṣṇa that manifests when He is thoroughly immersed in separation from Śrīmatī Rādhikā (who is displaying *māna*, Her mood of jealous anger), or when He is embraced by Śrīmatī Rādhikā (after Her *māna* is broken). At these times, His own dark complexion vanishes and He assumes Her bright, golden lustre. I worship the lotus feet of that Śrī Kṛṣṇa."

The *bhāva* that lies within the heart of Śrī Gurupāda-padma is profound and full of excellent *siddhānta*. It is the *bhāva* of the *maṣjarīs*, the maidservants of Śrīmatī Rādhikā, who feel that Kṛṣṇa should indeed feel great distress when He is separated from Śrīmatī Rādhikā. They become very pleased to see this distress, and arrange Kṛṣṇa's *abhisāra*, or meeting, with Rādhā at that time. This *bhāva* is prominent in Śrī Rūpānuga Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas.

While visiting Braja some five hundred and fifty years ago, Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu resided for several days at Akrūra Ghāṭa. Daily, he would come to this very beautiful Imlitalā Ghāṭa on the bank of the Yamunā, where He was immersed in *bhāva* as He chanted *harināma kīrtana*. He bestowed His mercy upon Kṛṣṇadāsa Rājapūta here.

One day, while Mahāprabhu was staying here, some people requested Him to come to Kālīya Hrada and take *darśana* of Śrī Kṛṣṇa who they said was again manifesting His *līlā* there at night. Mahāprabhu told them to wait for a few

days. Nonetheless, crowds of people began to throng to Kālīya Dāha at night. At last, it became evident that the spectacle on the Yamunā was nothing more than some Muslims in a boat catching fish. A light was burning on the bow of the boat. When the fishermen on the bow stood up and moved about, it appeared as if someone was dancing. The boat looked like a serpent, and the burning light like the serpent's jewel. When the true facts were revealed, Mahāprabhu said to the people, "Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa does not manifest such pastimes before the masses of ordinary people of Kali-yuga. Such pastimes appear only in the hearts of *śuddha bhaktas*." Some days later, Śrī Caitanya Mahā-prabhu and Śrī Vallabha Bhaṭṭācārya proceeded to Nīlācala via Saurom and Prayāga.

It is said that several years ago someone cut into a branch of the ancient *imlī* tree and blood oozed from it. The person who severed the branch realised that he had committed an offence and repeatedly prayed for forgiveness. The *dhāma-vāsīs* believe that *siddha mahātmās* are still performing *bhajana* in Vṛndāvana in the form of the trees and creepers.

Jhāḍū Maṇḍala

The pastime connected with this place occurred at the time of the famous Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī. Śrīla Śyāmānanda, Śrīla Narottama Ṭhākura and Śrīla Śrīnivāsa Ācārya studied *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* and the Gosvāmī literatures from the young Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī, who gave Śyāmānanda the service of sweeping this ancient place of Kṛṣṇa's *līlā*.

One day, while he was sweeping during the *brāhma-muhūrta*, Śyāmānanda found a golden anklet. Previously, Jīva Gosvāmī had instructed him to return any lost object that he might find directly to its owner, not to anyone else. If any others should try to claim a lost item, he should inform them of Jīva Gosvāmī's instruction to him. Śyāmānanda therefore very carefully tied the golden anklet in the corner of his upper garment. A short while later, two *braja-bālās* (young girls) came to him and said, "The anklet you found belongs to our *sakhī*, and we have been looking for it. Give it to us."

Śrī Śyāmānandajī humbly replied, "Whomever the anklet belongs to should personally come and collect it. I will not give it to you."

The *kiśorīs* replied, "Do you feel no shame? How can you dare desire to see the face of Kiśorī Bahū?" But Śyāmānanda adhered to his words and did not give them the anklet. The two *kiśorīs* then brought their girlfriend to Śyāmānanda and said, "Tie the anklet around Her foot." Śrī Śyāmānanda's hands trembled as he affectionately tied the anklet around the foot of their friend. These young girls were none other than Śrīmatī Rādhikā Herself and Her two *sakhīs*, Lalitā and Viśākhā. Śrīmatī Rādhikā ceaselessly desires to bestow mercy in this way upon Her loving devotees (*anurāgī bhaktas*).

By this event, Śyāmānanda's life became successful. Previously his name was Duḥkhī Kṛṣṇa dāsa, but upon receiving the mercy of Śrīmatījī, his name became Śyāmānanda dāsa. Śrīmatī Lalitājī stamped that anklet on Śyāmānanda's forehead. Even today, those in the spiritual family lineage of

Śyāmānanda Prabhu wear a *tilaka* in the shape of the anklet on their forehead.

The following incident also took place here. Once, a long time ago, an old woman lived at Jhādū Maṇḍala, and in her house she had a grinding-stone. She used this stone to grind wheat for others and in this way carried on her livelihood. But she was an *ekāntika bhakta* of Kṛṣṇa. As she ground wheat, her beautiful voice sang the sweet names of Kṛṣṇa, while the grindstone made a rumbling *gharr-gharr* sound.

One day, as she was grinding during *brāhma-muhūrta*, absorbed in singing the sweet names of Kṛṣṇa, a beautiful dark-complexioned young boy appeared and put one foot on the grindstone. He said, “Maiyā! Why do you turn the grindstone so it makes this rumbling *gharr-gharr* sound? I cannot sleep because of this sound.”

The old lady became a little fearful and said, “My dear son, if I don’t work the grindstone, then how will I maintain my life?”

The beautiful, dark-complexioned boy replied, “I will put My footprint on your grindstone. People will come to take *darśana* of this footprint and give generous offerings. Their offerings will easily maintain you. Thus, you won’t need to use the grindstone anymore.” Saying this, the dark-complex-ioned boy disappeared.

When morning came, the old lady saw that the boy’s footprint had fully appeared on her grindstone. A crowd of people lined up, desirous to take *darśana* of the footprint, and this crowd increased every day. The old lady was able to maintain herself easily through the donations she received, and she always remained intoxicated (*unmatta*) remembering this *līlā*.

Śṛṅgāra Vaṭa

This place lies a little towards the east from Imlītalā on the bank of the Yamunā. While out grazing the cows, Subala and the other *sakhās* joyfully decorated Kṛṣṇa here with di-verse colours and ornaments. In turn, to break Śrīmatī Rādhikā’s *māna*, Śrī Kṛṣṇa ornamented Her with marvel-lously imaginative decorations made of flowers that He had personally picked. This is very wonderfully described in *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*.

During *rāsa-līlā*, when Śrīmatī Rādhikā saw Śrī Kṛṣṇa dance with other *gopīs* as well as with Her, She left the *rāsa* in *māna*. Wishing to hide Herself, She sat down in this solitary place. Here, *rasika* Kṛṣṇa decorated Śrī-matījī with *belī*, *camelī* and other flowers that He had personally picked, and thereby pleased Her. When the other *sakhīs* were search-ing for Śrī Kṛṣṇa, one *sakhī* said, “O *sakhīs*, look! Look here! *Priya* Śrī Kṛṣṇa picked flowers for His beloved here, standing on His toes, and therefore the ground is marked with only the front portion of His lotus feet.” ³

Kṛṣṇa was decorating Śrīmatī when He heard the loud voices of the *gopīs* nearby. Kṛṣṇa requested Śrīmatījī to quickly leave this place with Him, but She refused on the excuse of being tired. Śyāmasundara then crouched

down and requested Her to sit on His shoulder, but just as She was about to do so, He disappeared. Distressed in separation, Śrīmatījī fainted, crying out:

*hā nātha ramaṇa preṣṭha / kvāsi kvāsi māha-bhuja
dāsyās te kṛpaṇāyā me / sakhe darśaya sannidhim
(Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 10.30.39)*

“O master! My lover! O dearest, where are You? Where are You? Please, O mighty-armed one, O friend, show Yourself to Me, Your maidservant who is very much aggrieved by Your absence.”

When the *sakhīs* found Śrīmatī Rādhikā thus over-whelmed in separation, they consoled Her and took Her with them to the bank of the Yamunā.

The following pastime also took place here. While wandering throughout Braja Maṇḍala, Śrīman Nityānanda Prabhu stayed near ŚṛṅgāraVaṭa on the bank of the Yamunā for a few days. He was always absorbed in the *bhāva* of Śrī Baladeva. Sometimes He would be fully absorbed as an *avadhūta*. Holding on to the necks of the cows, He would cry and ask them, “Have you seen Kanhaiyā? Where is He?” Sometimes He would catch hold of the cowherd men and ask them with tears in His eyes, “Where is Kanhaiyā?” One day, He heard a voice from the sky announce, “Your Kanhaiyā as Śacīnandana Gaurahari in Nadiyā is waiting for You to come to Him.”

Śṛṅgāra Vaṭa is thus also known as Nityānanda Vaṭa because Nityānanda Prabhu resided here. The presiding deities in the *mandira* are Nitāi-Gaura and Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa. Just near the *mandira* under the ancient *vaṭa* tree is a unique painting in which Śrī Kṛṣṇa is decorating Śrīmatī Rādhikā.

Cīra Ghāṭa

There is an ancient *kadamba* tree on the bank of the Yamunā where Kṛṣṇa stole the clothes of the *gopa-ramaṇīs* who were bathing here after having completed their Kātyāyanī-vrata. These *braja-kumārīs* were daily bathing in Śrī Yamunā at *brāhma-muhūrta*. They would make a deity of Kātyāyanī, Yogamāyā, out of sand and worship her on the bank of the Yamunā while reciting the following *mantra*:

*kātyāyani mahā-māye / mahā-yoginy adhīśvarī
nanda-gopa-sutaṁ devī / patiṁ me kuru te namaḥ
(Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 10.22.4)*

“O goddess Kātyāyanī, O Mahā-māya, O Mahā-yoginī and the mighty controller of all, please make the son of Nanda Mahārāja my husband. I offer my obeisances unto you.”

At the end of the *vrata*, Kṛṣṇa Himself arrived there on the excuse of stealing their clothes and bestowed upon them their desired boon: “Your heart’s desires will be fulfilled on the night of the next Śarada Pūrṇimā.”

Near Śergarh is another place which is famous as Cīra Ghāṭa. A *kadamba* tree also stands there. There is no doubt that both these places are Cīra Ghāṭa. The same pas-time takes place in different *kalpas*, and therefore it can occur in more than one place.

Keśī Ghāṭa

This place lies a little east of Cīra Ghāṭa on the bank of the Yamunā. Kṛṣṇa killed the Keśī demon here. Once, Kṛṣṇa and His *sakhās* were grazing the cows here. Madhumaṅgala joked with Him, “Dear Sakhā, if You give me Your peacock feather, sweet flute and yellow garments, then all the *gopas* and *gopīs* will love me and feed me delicious *laḍḍū*. Nobody will even ask You if you would like some.” Smilingly, Kṛṣṇa personally dressed Madhumaṅgala up in His peacock feather and yellow garments and handed him His flute and staff. Now all dressed up, Madhumaṅgala began to strut about here and there.

At this time, the very powerful Keśī demon assumed the form of a huge horse. Neighing and whinnying, he appeared there to kill Kṛṣṇa. Mahārāja Kaṁsa had instructed him, “Whomever you see wearing a peacock feather on his head and yellow garments on his limbs, and holding a flute in his hand, know that person to be Kṛṣṇa for certain and kill Him.” Upon seeing Madhumaṅgala dressed as Kṛṣṇa, Keśī attacked him with his two hind legs. Kṛṣṇa quickly came to save Madhumaṅgala and killed the Keśī demon. Although the demon’s legs did not so much as touch Madhumaṅgala, the *brāhmaṇa* boy lost consciousness just by the breeze created by the movement of Keśī’s legs. After Kṛṣṇa killed Keśī, however, Madhumaṅgala became embarrassed. He went to Kṛṣṇa and handed back His flute, peacock feather and yellow cloth. He told Him, “I don’t want any *laḍḍūs*. My life is worth *lākhs* of *laḍḍūs*.” The cowherd boys began to laugh. Even today, the memory of this *līlā* will enter our heart by taking *darśana* of Keśī Ghāṭa.

Nidhuvana

The word *nidhu* means *sūrata-kṛīḍā*, ‘amorous pastimes’. *Govinda-līlāmṛta* and other scriptures give beautiful descriptions of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa’s *sūrata-kṛīḍā* in Nidhu-vana. These scriptures indicate that because the *keli-vilāsa* during night (*niśa*) takes place in the *keli-kuṣjas* of Nidhuvana, so the *śayana-vilāsa*, or pastime of sleeping, at the end of the night (*niśānta*) also takes place here. Seeing dawn approaching, Vṛndā-devī becomes alarmed and orders the *śuka*, *sārī*, peacocks, cuckoos, bumblebees and so forth to make their sweet humming and other sounds to wake up Kiśora and Kiśorī. The *rāgānuga bhaktas*, and especially the eminent *rūpānuga rasika bhaktas*, relish this *niśānta-līlā* in their hearts while chanting *nāma-saṅkīrtana*. Śrīpāda Viśva-nātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura gives a nectarean description of this *līlā* in his *Svapna-vilāsa*.

Once, when Śrī Śrī Rādhā-KṛṣṇaYugala were sleeping in a *keli-kuṣja* of Nidhuvana at the end of the night, Śrī Vṛṣabhānu Nandinī had an amazing dream. Upon waking, She woke Her Prāṇa-vallabha and said, “Priyatama, I just had an amazing dream. In that dream I saw an incomparable river, just like the Yamunā. Along that river I saw a su-premely charming bank, just like a bank along the Yamunā. On that bank, which resembled a grove in Vṛndāvana, I saw a wonderful golden-complexioned young man singing and

dancing very beautifully. Being absorbed in an internal mood, He was carried away in dancing to the rhythm of the *mṛdaṅga* and *kartālas*. That *gaura kiśora* was crying and uttering ‘*Hā Kṛṣṇa! Hā Kṛṣṇa!*’ and sometimes ‘*Hā Rādhē! Hā Rādhē! Where are You?*’ Sometimes He rolled on the ground, and sometimes He became un-conscious. He distributed these sentiments of His freely to the entire universe, from a blade of grass to Lord Brahmā.

“Priyatama! Upon seeing Him, I began to think, ‘Who is this golden-complexioned youth? Am I that *gaura kiśora* who is constantly crying and uttering ‘*Hā Kṛṣṇa! Hā Kṛṣṇa!*’? And is the golden-complexioned *kiśora* crying out in a loud voice ‘*Hā Rādhē! Hā Rādhē! Where are You?*’ no one else but You, Śrī Kṛṣṇa, My Prāṇa-priyatama?”

Śrī Kṛṣṇa said, “*He Priyatame!* At different times I have given You *darśana* of Nārāyaṇa and some of My other forms, yet You were never astonished. Who this golden-complex-ioned *kiśora* is who is bewildering Your mind I cannot say.” Speaking in this way, He began to smile.

Rādhikā replied, “Prāṇa-vallabha! Now I understand that this golden form is no one but You. No one other than You is able to infatuate Me in this way.”

Kṛṣṇa then showed Śrī Rādhikā Her dream in His Kaustubha jewel, just as She had seen it. Śrīmatī Rādhikā said, “In Your childhood, the all-knowing Garga Ṛṣi informed Nanda Bābā that in the be-ginning of the forthcoming Kali-yuga, his son will appear as yellow-complexioned Gaurāṅga. A prediction by Garga Ṛṣi can never be false. Therefore, My dream must be true, and the golden youth I saw in the dream must, in fact, be You.”

Hearing this, Śrī Kṛṣṇa said, “Prāṇeśvarī! I will assume Your golden complexion and the sentiments of Your inner heart to appear in the form of Gaurāṅga. I will thus person-ally relish Your nectarean *bhāvas*. At the same time, I will preach *rāga-mārga bhakti* through *harināma-saṅkīrtana*. In fact, I will appear in the form of the most merciful Gaurāṅga just to distribute My rare *prema*. You will also appear on earth with Me as My associate.” Śrī Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa thus gave an indication in this pastime of the future appearance (*avatāra*) of Śrī Gaura.

In Nidhuvana, Śrīmatī Rādhikā, decorated in regal apparel, sat on a royal throne in a *kuṣja*. Śrī Kṛṣṇa, dressed as a police officer, protected the entrance of the *kuṣja* and the area within it. This is called *rāī-rāja līlā*. The poets in the Gauḍīya line have given very beautiful descriptions of this *līlā*.

Viśākhā Kuṇḍa lies in Nidhuvana, just as Lalitā Kuṇḍa lies in Sevā Kuṣja. Śrī Rādhā-Bihārījī manifested this *kuṇḍa* of sweet, delicious water with His flute to relieve the thirst of His *priya-sakhī* Viśākhā as well as that of the other *sakhīs*. Later, the famous Svāmī Haridāsa, who was very skilled in devotional music, found the deity of Śrī Bāṅke-Bihārī in this same Viśākhā Kuṇḍa.

Svāmī Haridāsajī used to please Śrī Bihārījī by sweetly singing devotional songs he had personally composed as he played the *vīṇā*. While singing, he would become so absorbed that he would forget his body and mind. The famous Baiju-bāvara and Tānsena were his disciples. Upon hearing about Svāmī Haridāsajī’s glories from the mouth of Tānsena, who was the jewel

among Emperor Akbara's ministers, Akbara himself desired to relish the nectar of Haridāsa's musical talent. But Svāmī Haridāsa had firmly resolved not to entertain anyone but his Ṭhākuraḥ.

Emperor Akbara therefore disguised himself one day as an ordinary man and, along with Tānsena, appeared in the *kuṭī* of Svāmī Haridāsa in Nidhuvana. Tānsena, who also was very expert in music, had purposely brought his *vīṇā* along and now began to sing a sweet song. His singing enchanted Akbara. Svāmī Haridāsa then took the *vīṇā* from the hands of Tānsena and began to sing the same song, pointing out the errors Tānsena had made in singing it. Svāmī Haridāsa's singing was so sweet and attractive that even the deer, birds and other animals of the forest came to that spot, where they listened silently. Emperor Akbara's amazement knew no bounds. He was so pleased that he immediately wanted to present something to Svāmī Haridāsa, but the wise Tānsena indicated to the emperor not to do so as it would alter Haridāsa's mood. The *samādhi* of this *mahāpuruṣa* is still present in Nidhuvana.

Dhīra-samīra

This place is situated on the bank of Śrī Yamunā just near Vaṁśī Vaṭa. It is the place of *rāsa-līlā*, where Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa Yugala perform Their eternal *keli-vilāsa*. The breeze (*samīra*) itself would become so gentle (*dhīra*) and calm here upon having the *darśana* of these pastimes that it would be unable to move even an inch. Therefore, this place has become known as Dhīra-samīra.

Śrī Gaurīdāsa Paṇḍita established the *kuṣja* and temple at Dhīra-samīra. He was the younger brother of Sūryadāsa Sarkhela, who was Nityānanda Prabhu's father-in-law, the father of Jāhnavā and Vasudhā. Śrī Gaurīdāsa Paṇḍita is one of the main associates of Śrīman Mahāprabhu. He came to Vṛndāvana at the end of his life, where he established Dhīra-samīra Kuṣja and began the *sevā-pūjā* of his *ārādhyadeva*, Śrī Śyāmarāya. His place of *bhajana* and his *samādhi* are also here.

The famous Vaiṣṇava poet Śrī Jayadeva Gosvāmī has mentioned this *kuṣja* in *Śrī Gīta-govinda* in his well-known song:

*dhīra-samīre yamunā-tīre vasati vane vana-mālī
gopī-pīna payodhara-mardana caṣcala-kara-yuga-sālī*

The *keli-vaṭa*, under which Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa performed the pastime mentioned in this *śloka*, is situated in this Dhīra-samīra Kuṣja.

Śrī Gopāla Guru Gosvāmī was the dear disciple of Śrī Vakreśvara Paṇḍita, one of the well-known associates of Śrīman Mahāprabhu. In his last days, he became so dis-tressed in separation from Kṛṣṇa that in the eyes of worldly people he left his material body. His beloved disciple Dhyānacanda Gosvāmī was also very learned and a topmost *rasika bhakta*. During his time, government officials committed some atrocities against Rādhā-Kānta Maṭha and the *bhajana-kuṭī* of Haridāsa Ṭhākura. This caused him great sorrow. At that time, a Vaiṣṇava from Vṛndāvana gave him the following news, "Are!

Why are you so worried? We have seen your *guru*, Śrī Gopāla Guru Gosvāmī, performing *bhajana* at Dhīra-samīra. Go to him. He will settle every-thing.” Hearing this, Dhyānacanda Gosvāmī became very joyful and immediately travelled to Vṛndāvana on foot.

Dhyānacanda Gosvāmī reached Vṛndāvana in a few days and upon entering Dhīra-samīra, he became astonished. He saw Śrī Gopāla Guru Gosvāmī with *nāma-mālā* in his hand, submerged in *bhāva* as he chanted *nāma-saṅkīrtana*. A constant flow of tears streamed from his eyes as he remembered various pastimes. Śrī Dhyānacandajī fell at his feet like a rod and began to cry. He begged him to return to Purī Dhāma. Śrī Gopāla Guru refused to go in person but said, “Return to Purī without anxiety. The disturbance of the government officials will end forever.” By his order, Dhyānacanda Gosvāmī returned to Rādhā-Kānta Maṭha in Purī. The government officials apologised to him repeatedly for their deeds.

This is that same Dhīra-samīra where Śrī Dhyānacanda Gosvāmī had a direct *darśana* of *aprakāṣa* Śrī Gopāla Guru Gosvāmī. Dhīra-samīra gives *ānanda* to the devotees. Even today, it treasures all these *līlās* in its heart.

Māna-Bhaṣjana Sthala

At this place, Kṛṣṇa subdued Śrīmatī Rādhikā’s *māna*, jealous anger. The word *bhaṣjana* means ‘breaking’. Māna-Bhaṣjana Sthala lies within Dhīra-samīra. In the book *Braja Parikramā*, it is said that the sweet *māna-bhaṣjana līlā* which Śrī Jayadeva Gosvāmī describes in *Gīta-govinda* in his famous verse *smara-garala-khaṇḍanam mama śīrasi maṇḍanam dehi pada-pallavam udāram*⁴ took place here.

Vaṁśī Vaṭa

This is the place where Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa Yugala together with the *sakhīs* performed *rāsa-līlā* as described in *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, the pure and faultless authority. To bestow the result of the Kātyāyanī-pūjā upon the *gopa-kumārīs*, *rasika-bihārīs* Śrī Kṛṣṇa granted them a boon. To fulfil this boon, He played a sweet tune on His *veṇu* on a full moon night. Hear-ing the wonderful flute-song, the *gopīs*, being intoxicated in *prema* (*premonmatta*), came here. *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (10.29.4) describes this as follows:

*niśamya gītām tad anaṅga-vardhanam
vraja-striyaḥ kṛṣṇa-grhīta-mānasāḥ
ājagmur anyonyam alakṣitodyamāḥ
sa yatra kānto java-lola-kunḍalāḥ*

“When the young women of Vṛndāvana heard Kṛṣṇa’s flute song, which arouses romantic feelings, their minds were captivated by Him. They went to where their lover waited, each unknown to the others, moving so quickly that their earrings swung back and forth.”

Rasikendra-śekhara Śrī Kṛṣṇa gave His surrendered *gopīs* many reasons why they should return home to serve their husbands, based on the pretext of

religious transgression. But the clever *gopīs* very easily refuted all His arguments.

Kṛṣṇa's *śārādīya-rāsa* with countless *gopīs* took place here. One Kṛṣṇa was dancing between two *gopīs* or one *gopī* was dancing between two Kṛṣṇas. In this way, *rāsa* took place with astonishing dancing and singing. Śrīmatī Rādhikā entered into *māna* and the other *gopīs* became *saubhāgya-mada*, proud of their good fortune. Seeing this, *rasika-śekhara* Śrī Kṛṣṇa disappeared from that place in order to decorate Śrīmatī Rādhikā's *māna* and to remove the pride of the other *gopīs*.

Thereafter, the *gopīs*, suffering separation from Kṛṣṇa and crying loudly, began to sing, *jayati te 'dhikam janmanā vrajaḥ...*⁵ Hearing their singing, Śrī Kṛṣṇa again appeared, and at this place He expressed His gratitude to the *gopīs* in sweet words:

*na pāraye 'haṁ niravadya-saṁyujāṁ
sva-sādhū-kṛtyaṁ vibudhāyuṣāpi vaḥ
yā mābhajan durjara-geha-śṛṅkhalāḥ
saṁvṛścyā tad vaḥ pratiyātu sādhunā*

(Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 10.32.22)

"You have performed an extraordinary deed: you have given up everything for Me. For this sacrifice, I am eternally in-debted to you and can never repay you." This is the place where *rāsa-līlā* was performed, and is thus the crest-jewel among all *līlā-sthalīs*.

Śrī Vajranābha Mahārāja planted a tree here in remembrance of this *rāsa-sthalī*, but after some time the Yamunā flooded that place. Five hundred and fifty years ago, Śrī Mādhva Paṇḍita, a disciple of Śrī Gadādhara Paṇḍita, took one of its branches and planted it here, and that branch transformed into a vast tree. Śrī Mādhva Paṇḍita found the deity Śrī Gopīnātha here while engaged in *bhajana*. There are four very small temples in each of the four corners of the quadrangular wall of Vamśī Vaṭa. The deities of Śrī Rāmānujācārya, Śrī Madhvācārya, Śrī Viṣṇusvāmī and Śrī Nimbārkācārya were established within them. Nowadays, some other *mūrtis* have replaced them. Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas used to do *sevā* here, but then Brahmācārījī, the *guru* of the King of Gvāliyor, bought this place. Since then, it has been under the Nimbārka Sampradāya.

Gopīśvara Mahādeva

In *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, Mahādeva Śaṅkara, the *deva* of the *devas*, has been called the foremost Vaiṣṇava. He and Bhagavatī Pārvatī are always absorbed in meditation on Kṛṣṇa's *aṣṭa-kālīya līlā*. Once, during Śrī Kṛṣṇa's manifest pastimes, Śaṅkara desired to take *darsana* of Kṛṣṇa's captivating *rāsa-līlā* with his own eyes. Being very eager to do so, he came directly to Vṛndāvana from Kailāśa. At the gate outside Vṛndāvana, some attendant *gopīs* stopped him, because no male except for Śrī Kṛṣṇa can enter *rāsa*. But since when has Śaṅkara easily agreed to anything? He asked the attendant *gopīs* how he

might be admitted, and they told him to worship Bhagavatī Yogamāyā Paurṇamāsī (Pūrṇimā).

Śaṅkara did so and received the *darśana* of Yogamāyā. Knowing the desire of Śaṅkara, Pūrṇimā took his hands and dipped him in Brahma Kuṇḍa nearby. When he came out of the *kuṇḍa*, he had been transformed into an extremely beau-tiful young *gopī*. Pūrṇimā seated Śaṅkara, now a *gopī*, inside a *kuṣja* north-east of the *rāsa-sthalī*. She told him to take *darśana* of *rāsa-līlā* from there, and then she disappeared. After a short while, the *rāsa-līlā* began. The *gopīs* thought, “Today, for some reason or other, we are not feeling any happiness in singing and dancing.” They understood that some outsider had entered the arena, and they began to search for that person. In their search they came to this place, where they saw a new, unknown *gopī* sitting in a *kuṣja*. They caught that new *gopī* and began to question her, “What is your name? What is the name of your village? Who is your husband? Who is your father-in-law?” But the new *gopī* was unable to answer any of their questions. Instead, she could only cry. Yogamāyā had neither arranged her birth from the womb of a *gopī*, nor given her any name. The new *gopī* was not married to any *gopa* either, so what answers could she give? When the *gopīs* received no answer, they began to slap her cheeks till they became swollen. Seeing Mahādeva’s misery, Pūrṇimā’s heart melted. She went there and explained that this *gopī* was an object of her mercy. She requested the *gopīs* and Kṛṣṇa to be merciful to her. Śrī Kṛṣṇa, knowing the internal desire of Pūrṇimā, gave Śaṅkara the name Gopīśvara and granted him the boon that a *sādhaka* would be unable to enter Vṛndāvana, and especially into Kṛṣṇa’s sweet pastimes there, without first receiving his mercy.

The Gosvāmī literatures also describe that at the time of Kṛṣṇa’s *prakaṣa-līlā*, the *gopīs* worshipped Gopīśvara Mahā-deva with the desire to obtain *sevā* of Kṛṣṇa. For instance, Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī’s *Śrī Vraja-vilāsa-stava* (verse 87) states:

*mudā gopendrasyātmaja-bhuja-pariṣvaṅga-nidhaye
sphurada-gopī-vṛndairyamaiha bhagavantaṁ praṇayibhiḥ
bhajadbhisa tair bhaktyā svama bhilaṣitaṁ prāptuma cirād
yamī-tīre gopīśvaramanudināṁ taṁ kila bhaje*

“To obtain the jewel of being embraced by the arms of Brajendra-nandana Śyāmasundara, the *gopīs*, who possess firm, loving, intimate attachment for Śrī Kṛṣṇa, joyfully worshipped Sadāśiva with great devotion and had all their internal desires fulfilled without delay. Daily I worship that Gopīśvara Mahādeva who resides on the bank of the Yamunā.”

The *praṇāma-mantra* composed by Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura for Gopīśvara Mahādeva (*Saṅkalpa Kalpadruma*, verse 103) clearly indicates that Gopīśvara Mahādeva is the bestower of unadulterated (*viśuddha*) *kṛṣṇa-prema*:

*vṛndāvanāvani-pate! jaya soma! soma-maule
sanaka-sanandana-sanātana-naradeḍya*

*gopīśvara! vraja-vilāsī-yugāṅghri-padme
prema prayaccha nirupādhi namo namste*

“O gatekeeper of Vṛndāvana! O Soma, all glories to you! O you whose forehead is decorated with the moon, and who is worshipable for the sages headed by Sanaka, Sanandana, Sanātana and Nārada! O Gopīśvara! Desiring that you bestow upon me *prema* for the lotus feet of Śrī Śrī Rādhā-Mādhava, who perform joyous pastimes in Braja-dhāma, I offer *praṇāmas* unto you time and again.”

Jṣāna-Gudaḍī

When Śrī Kṛṣṇa returned to Mathurā from *gurukula*, He sent His dear Uddhava to Nanda-Gokula to console His parents and the *gopīs*. What consolation could Uddhava actually give to the tormented hearts of Nanda Bābā, Yaśodā Maiyā and the *gopīs* that would relieve them from the fire of separation? Kṛṣṇa sent Uddhava on the excuse of consol-ing the Brajabāsīs, but the hidden truth is that there was no one in Mathurā who could console Kṛṣṇa, who was scorching in separation from the *gopīs*. What to speak of console Kṛṣṇa, who in Mathurā could even understand His sentiments? Therefore, Śrī Kṛṣṇa sent His dear Uddhava to that school where He Himself had learned lessons on *prema* – Braja. Kṛṣṇa considered Uddhava a qualified student for such lessons. In that school, the principal was Rādhārānī, the embodiment of *mahābhāva*; and Lalitā, Viśākhā and the other *sakhīs* were the teachers.

Being an ocean of mercy, the *gopīs* admitted into their school this student that Kṛṣṇa had sent them. Uddhava delivered to the *gopīs* Kṛṣṇa’s message, which was full of *tattva-jṣāna*. But they tore it up so that it resembled a tattered garment (*gudaḍī*) and threw it into the water of the Yamunā. That *jṣāna-gudaḍī* drifted downstream and fell into the Gaṅgā at Prayāga. From there it floated to the salt ocean where it was lost forever. The place where the *gopīs* abandoned that message filled with *tattva-jñāna*, leaving it to float down the Yamunā like a torn garment (*gudaḍī*), is known today as Jṣāna-Gudaḍī.

Brahma Kuṇḍa

This *kuṇḍa* lies a little towards the south-west of Jṣāna-Gudaḍī. Śrī Yogamāyā Paurṇamāsījī gave Mahādeva Śaṅkara a *gopī*-form by dipping him in this *kuṇḍa*. Śrī Vṛndā-devī also gave Nārada the form of Nārādī Gopī by bathing him here, thus fulfilling his desire to take *darśana* of *mahā-rāsa*, which is very difficult to obtain.

There is an *aśoka* tree on the northern side of this Brahma Kuṇḍa which blossoms with flowers at exactly noontime on the Dvādaśī of Vaiśākhā Śuklā. Only extreme-ly fortunate *rasika bhaktas*, however, can take *darśana* of those flowers – no one else. This is stated in *Varāha Purāṇa*.⁶

Veṇu Kūpa

While engaged in *vihāra* in Vṛndāvana, Śrī Kṛṣṇa knew that His beloveds were thirsty, so He touched His *veṇu* to the earth and blew into it. A stream of water which pierced Pātāla, the lower regions, emerged by the sound of Kṛṣṇa's flute. The water was very cool and fragrant. The *gopīs* drank this water, praising Kṛṣṇa and His flute. They named this well Veṇu Kūpa (the flute-well).

Dāvānala Kuṇḍa

On the day Kālīya Nāga was subdued, Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma and the *gopas* and *gopīs* could not return to their residences in Chaṭṭikarā as night had already fallen. They moved away from the poisonous Kālīya Daha to a *sarovara* a little distance away to the east. The water of this lake was clean and sweet, and after drinking water they rested here. Seeing a good opportunity to kill Kṛṣṇa and His associates, the servants of the wicked Kaṁsa set this forest ablaze in all directions. Very soon, a devastating fire raged throughout the forest. Kṛṣṇa told everyone to close his eyes. He also closed His eyes, and at once swallowed that devastating forest fire as if it were cool water. The *sarovara* where this *līlā* took place is called Dāvānala Kuṇḍa, *dāvānala* meaning 'forest fire'.

The Temples of Śrī Vṛndāvana

There are currently thousands of temples in Vṛndāvana, and therefore Vṛndāvana is also known as 'The City of Temples'. There is a temple in every home. The following temples are some of the principal ancient ones: Śrī Govinda Mandira, Śrī Sākṣī Gopāla, Śrī Gopīnāthajī, Śrī Madana-Mohanajī, Śrī Rādhā-Ramañajī, Śrī Rādhā-Vinodajī, Śrī Rādhā-Mādhavajī, Śrī Rādhā-Dāmodarajī, Śrī Rādhā-Śyāmasundarajī, Śrī Rādhā-Gokulānandajī, Śrī Gaura-Nitāi at Śṛṅgāra Vaṭa, Śrī Sītānātha Mandira, Śrī Rādhā-Vallabha and Śrī Bāṅke-Bihārījī.

There are also many modern temples, like Śāhajī Mandira, Lālā Bābū Mandira, Śrī Raṅgajī Mandira, Taḍāsa Mandira, Jaipura Mandira, Hāḍābāḍī Kuṣja, Śrījī Mandira, Varddhmāna Rājamandira, Brahmācārījī Mandira, Giridhārījī Mandira, Ṭikārī Rānī Mandira, Śāhājāpura Mandira, Mahārānī Svarṇamayī Mandira, Kālābābū Kuṣja, Śrī Rūpa-Sanātana Mandira, Śrī Kṛṣṇa-Balarāma Mandira, and many others. To keep this book short, most of these have not been mentioned in any detail. A short description of some of the prominent temples is now given below.

Śrī Govinda Svāmī Tīrtha

The present name of this temple is Śrī Govinda-devajī Mandira, and its ancient name was Gomāṭilā. Śrī Rūpa Gosvāmī used to perform *sādhana-bhajana* in a small *bhajana-kuṭī* behind Śrī Rādhā-Dāmodara Mandira in Sevā Kuṣja. On the order of Śrīman Mahāprabhu, he composed different literatures on *bhakti* like *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* and *Ujjvala-nīlamanī* while living here.

Also, following the instruction of Mahāprabhu, he wanted to manifest the deity of Śrī Govinda that had previously been installed by Śrī Vajranābha. Daily, Śrī Rūpa Gosvāmī would perform the *paśca-kosī parikramā* of Vṛndāvana. One day, during his *parikramā*, he became very restless thinking about the deity of Śrī Govinda. He sat down under a tree on the bank of the Yamunā and wept, lamenting for His *darśana*. At that time, a beautiful Brajabāsī boy who was also doing *parikramā* walked past. He saw Śrī Rūpa Gosvāmī weeping under the tree, and asked him why he was crying. At first, Rūpa Gosvāmī said nothing, but when the boy persisted, he revealed to Him the pain in his heart. The Brajabāsī boy brought Rūpa Gosvāmī to Gomā Ṭilā and said, “Look! Every day, just before noon, one cow comes to this *ṭilā* (mound). Standing here, she irrigates this place with the milk from her udder. I think that your desire will be fulfilled at this place.” Saying this, the boy immediately disappeared.

Thinking of the beauty and sweet words of the boy, Śrī Rūpa Gosvāmī fainted. Upon regaining consciousness, he called the neighbouring Brajabāsīs, who very carefully dug up the earth at that place. There, a little under the ground, was Śrī Govindajī, more beautiful than millions of cupids. They performed His *abhiṣeka* with great ceremony. News of this spread quickly, and crowds of people gathered to take *darśana* of Śrī Govindajī.

Śrī Govinda-deva is Vṛndāvaneśvara – the *īśvara*, or Lord, of Śrī Vṛndāvana. In the *Skanda*, *Padma*, *Varāha* and other *Purāṇas*, He is said to be Vṛndāvana’s *rāja-rājeśvara*, king of kings. Śrī Govinda-deva is thus the *ārādhya devatā* (worshipable deity) of Vṛndāvana. *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* (Ādi 8.50-51) states:

*vṛndāvane kalpa-drume suvarṇa-sadana
mahā-yogapiṭha tāhāṇ ratna-simhāsana
tāte vasi ‘āche sadā vrajendra-nandana
‘śrī-govinda deva’ nāma-sākṣāt madana*

“At the *mahā-yogapiṭha* in Vṛndāvana, underneath *kalpa-drumas* (desire trees), is a golden throne bedecked with jewels. On that throne sits Brajendra-nandana, Śrī Govinda-deva, the transcendental Cupid.”

Caitanya-caritāmṛta (Ādi 1.16) also says:

*dīvyad-vṛndāraṇya-kalpa-drumādhaḥ
śrīmad-ratnāgāra-simhāsana-sthau
śrī-śrī-rādhā-śrīla-govinda-devau
preṣṭhālibhiḥ sevya-mānau smarāmi*

“I meditate upon Śrī Śrī Rādhā-Govinda-deva, who are seated beneath a *kalpa-vṛkṣa* tree on an effulgent bejeweled *simhāsana* in the supremely beautiful land of Vṛndāvana. There, They are always being served by Their beloved *sakhīs*, especially by Lalitā and Viśākhā.”

There are many famous statements regarding Śrī Govinda in many different scriptures. For instance, *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (6.8.20) states: *mām keśavo gadayā prātar avyād / govinda āsaṅgavam ātta-veṇuḥ*. “May Śrī Keśava

protect me with His club in the first portion of the day, and may Govinda, who is always engaged in playing His flute, protect me in the second portion of the day.” The *ṭīkā*, commentary, on this *śloka* very nicely elucidates its meaning.⁷ In the *Gopāla-pūrvatāpanyām*, there are statements like *tamekaṁ govindaṁ sac-cid-ānanda-vigraham*. The *Urddhvāmnāya* glorifies Śrī Govinda in the following *śloka*:

*gopāla eva govindaḥ / prakāṣṭāprakāṣṭaḥ sadā
vṛndāvane yogapiṭhe / sa eva satataṁ sthitaḥ
asau yuga-catuṣke’pi / śrīmad-vṛndāvanādhīpaḥ
pūjito nanda-gopādyaiḥ / kṛṣṇenāpi supūjitaḥ*

The *Atharva Veda* says, *gokulāraṇye mathurā-maṇḍale vṛndāvana-madhye sahasra-dala-madhye ‘ṣṭadala-keśare govindo’pi śyāmaḥ dvibhujo*, and so on. Furthermore, the *Skanda Purāṇa* states:

*govinda-svāmi nāmātra
vasatyarccayatmiko ‘cyutaḥ
gandharvair apsarobhīṣca
krīḍa mānaḥ sa modate*

Braja-bhakti-vilāsa also mentions Śrī Govinda in the following *śloka*:

*vṛndā-devī sametāya
govindāya namo namaḥ
loka-kalma-śanāśāya
paramātmā-svarūpiṇe*

Before Śrī Rūpa Gosvāmī’s arrival in Śrīdhāma Vṛndā-vana, it was unheard of to place a *vigraha* of Śrīmatī Rādhikā beside a *vigraha* of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. When Śrī Rūpa Gosvāmī reinstalled the *vigraha* of Śrī Govinda-deva, it so happened that a *vigraha* of Śrī Rādhikā, who was present in the temple of Jagannāthajī in Purī Dhāma, at a place named Cakrabeḍa was being worshipped by everyone as Lakṣmījī. Śrīmatī Rādhikā instructed the son of Mahārāja Pratāpa-rudra, Puruṣottama Jānā, in a dream: “I am not Lakṣmī; I am Rādhā, the beloved of Brajendra-nandana Śrī Kṛṣṇa. I have been waiting for the manifestation of Śrī Govinda-deva in Vṛndāvana. Now that He has appeared, with great care please send Me to Him.” The son of Mahārāja Pratāparudra did this, and the contemporary *gosvāmīs* placed this *vigraha* of Śrī Rādhā to the left of Śrī Govinda-devajī. After being united with Śrīmatī Rādhikā, Śrī Govindajī became famous by the name of Śrī Rādhā-Govinda.

Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu Himself sent His *svarūpa vigraha*, His own *mūrti* form, Śrī Gaura-Govinda to Vṛndāvana, with His associate Kāśīśvara Brahmācārī. That same deity is nearby, in the southern part of the Govindajī Mandira.

In 1590 A.D., a disciple of Śrī Raghunātha Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmī, Mahārāja Mānasingh of Jaipura, built an extensive seven-storey, red-stone temple, as inspired by his *guru*. In 1670 A.D., the tyrannical Mughal emperor Aurangzeb demolished this temple, destroying the top four floors. When he was in the

process of destroying the lower part, he suddenly received some inauspicious news and had to return to Delhi. Thus, the lower portion of the temple was saved. Before the temples of Vṛndāvana were destroyed, Śrī Govindajī and other worshipable deities of the Gauḍīyas were sent to Jaipura. In 1748 A.D., the *pratibhū vigraha* of Śrī Govinda-deva was installed here. Then, in 1819 A.D., Śrī Nandakumāra Vasu constructed the present temple. Situated in this temple is Śrī Govinda-deva with Śrī Rādhikājī to His left. The ancient and original Govinda-deva along with His beloved Rādhikā now reside in a temple near the royal palace in Jaipura. Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī jokingly forbids the *darśana* of Govinda-deva with the following words:

*smerāṁ bhaṅgī-traya paripacitāṁ sāci-vistīrṇa dṛṣṭim
vaṁśī-nyastādhara-kisalayām-ujjvalāṁ candrakeṇa
govindākhyāṁ hari-tanum itaḥ keśi-tīrthopakāṇṭhe
mā prekṣiṣṭhās tava yadi sakhe! bandhu-saṅge 'sti raṅgaḥ
(Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu 1.2.239)*

“If you have even a slight desire to enjoy life with your wife, sons, relatives and friends, then listen to my advice. Never go to Keśi Ghāṭa in Vṛndāvana, even by mistake. There, Śrī Hari as the *vigraha* of Govinda is standing in His *tribhaṅga-lalita*, three-fold bending form, smiling. Raising His eyebrows, He looks here and there with slightly crooked eyes. His *pītāmbara* (yellow cloth) is shimmering on His body, and He is decorated with a heart-stealing garland of forest flowers and bunches of fresh young leaves. *Aho!* The *vaṁśī*, the root cause of all troubles, is gracefully placed to His lips, and the peacock feather on His head is increasing His beauty. A person who even once takes *darśana* of this *vigraha* of Govinda with his own eyes never returns to his home, and his household life is ruined. Therefore, O *saṁsārī jīva*, be cautious! Never ever go towards Keśi Ghāṭa; other-wise an unthinkable disaster may occur.”

Śrī Madana-Mohana

Mahārāja Vajranābha installed the three *vigrahas* of Śrī Govinda, Śrī Gopīnātha and Śrī Madana-Mohana in Śrī-dhāma Vṛndāvana. In time, due to the oppression of the *mlecchas* (barbarians), the *pujārīs* hid these deities in various places and fled. Vṛndāvana turned into a dense forest. It has already been described how Śrī Govinda-deva reappeared after many years by the endeavours of Śrī Rūpa Gosvāmī. Now, we will briefly describe how Śrī Sanātana Gosvāmī manifested Śrī Madana-Mohanajī.

In the morning, Śrī Sanātana Gosvāmī used to walk sixteen miles from Vṛndāvana to Govardhana to perform the fourteen-mile long *parikramā* of Govardhana. From there, he would walk another sixteen miles to Mathurā to do *mādhukarī* and then again walk back to his *bhajana-kuṭī* in Vṛndāvana. One day, he came to the house of a Caube *brāhmaṇa* in Mathurā for *mādhukarī*. What did he see there? In the house of Caubejī, two beautiful

boys were playing the game *gullī-ḍaṇḍā*. Madana, the restless, fidgety boy with a *śyāma*-complexion defeated the son of the Caube. Madana climbed upon the shoulders of the defeated boy and enjoyed a 'horse ride'. But when the Caube's son defeated Madana the second time they played, and it was his turn to enjoy a ride on Madana's shoulders, Madana ran into the temple room. Seeing this, the son of the Caube angrily abused and pursued Him. He wanted to enter the temple, but the *pujārī* scolded him and chased him away. Pointing his forefinger at Madana, who had turned into the *vighraha*, the son of the Caube said, "Acchā, I'll see You tomorrow."

This scene amazed Śrī Sanātana Gosvāmī. The next day, he arrived a little earlier, at breakfast time, desiring to again have *darśana*. Although she had not yet taken bath, the Caubāin was making *khicrī* for both boys, who were sitting waiting for their breakfast. Maiyā was brushing her teeth with one end of a stick and was stirring the *khicrī* with the other end. When she had finished cooking, she served the boys the hot *khicrī* in bowls, cooling it down by blowing on it with her mouth. The boys were relishing this *khicrī* with great love.

Sanātana Gosvāmī could not tolerate her improper conduct. "Maiyā! It is not proper to cook *khicrī* without taking bath, to stir it with the stick you use to brush your teeth, and then to serve this contaminated breakfast to the boys."

The Caubāin realized her mistake, and replied, "Bābā! From tomorrow, I will be clean when I cook and serve the boys their breakfast."

Śrī Sanātana Gosvāmī wanted to see some more *līlās* of the *vighraha* of Śrī Madana-Mohana, so on the third day he went there again. Breakfast was delayed that day because Maiyā was taking bath. She then had to clean the pots. The hungry boys were demanding breakfast. Maiyā pacified them, and after completing her morning chores, she started cooking *khicrī*. The two boys were pulling on her cloth and insisting on eating at once. Sanātana Gosvāmī was unable to tolerate this. He approached her and said, "Maiyā, there is no need for you to be clean by bathing and so forth. If this Madana is pleased with your unclean and impure breakfast, then you should do as such. I have committed an offence at your feet. From tomorrow, you should do whatever you think is proper to satisfy them."

Just as Sanātana Gosvāmī was about to leave, the boy Madana came out of the temple room and said, "Bābā! I will come with you."

But Śrī Sanātana Gosvāmī replied, "I am completely *niṣkiṣcana*, a renunciate. I have neither a place to live, nor any arrangement to cook palatable food. If even Yaśodā Maiyā could not completely satisfy You, how can I take care of You?" The child Madana nonetheless insisted on coming with him. Sanātana Gosvāmī said, "If You really want to come, then You will have to follow me. I cannot carry You on my shoulders."

The boy said, "I will walk behind you, but don't turn around along the way to look at Me. You can look at Me only in your *bhajana-kuṭī*."

When Sanātana Gosvāmī had reached his *bhajana-kuṭī*, he turned around and saw the boy Madana smile and change into His *vigraha* form. Sanātana Gosvāmī constructed an altar by putting a board on top of a few stones and seated Him there. Every day, he would cook some balls of dough without salt on live coals, and offer them to the deity. One day, as Sanātana Gosvāmī was making his offering, Madana-Mohanajī asked him for some salt. Sanātana Gosvāmī would happily have given salt if only he had some, but there was no salt in the *kuṭī*. Madana-Mohanajī told him, “I am not able to swallow this dry dough-ball.” Upon hearing this, Sanātana Gosvāmī began to repent.

At that time, Kṛṣṇadāsa Kapūra, a rich merchant from the Multāna province, happened to be travelling along the Yamunā carrying valuable articles for trade in large boats. As the boats approached Sanātana Gosvāmī’s *bhajana-kuṭī*, they got stuck in the sand. Despite several efforts, the boats could not be released from the sand. The merchant came ashore and saw the extremely beautiful *vigraha* of Śrī Madana-Mohana in front of the *kuṭī*. Sitting down on the invitation of Sanātana Gosvāmī, the merchant began to weep and lament to him about his circumstance. In his mind, he firmly vowed, “As soon as my boats are freed from the sand, I will construct a beautiful temple for Śrī Madana-Mohanajī with the profits I make from this journey, and I will also make proper arrangements for His *sevā* and *bhoga*.” The moment he resolved this, his boats were dislodged and started drifting again. He made an enormous profit from his trade and, on the inspiration of Śrī Sanātana Gosvāmī, constructed a huge temple for Śrī Madana-Mohana. However, Śrī Sanātana Gosvāmī entrusted all the arrangements of *sevā*, *pūjā*, offering of *bhoga* and so forth to the *pujārīs* and again began performing *mādhukarī* in Braja. In this way, he maintained his life by living under a different tree every night and performing rigid *sādhana-bhajana*.

After the disappearance of Śrī Sanātana Gosvāmī, Aurangzeb, who was inimical to the Hindus, desecrated this temple in 1670 A.D., destroying the dome and other parts. Before he did this, Madana-Mohanajī and other deities of Vṛndāvana were moved to Jaipura. Nowadays, Madana-Mohanajī resides in Karaulī. In 1748 A.D., a *pratibhū vigraha* of Madana-Mohanajī was established here. Then, in 1819 A.D., Śrī Nandalāla Vasu constructed the present temple. The ancient hand-written scriptures *Sevā Prākāṣya* and *Iṣṭalābha* mention that Sanātana Gosvāmījī obtained Śrī Madana-Gopālajī from Paraśurāma Caube of Mahāvana in *saṁvat* 1590 (1534 A.D.) and re-established the deity’s *sevā-pūjā* in the same year on Dvītīyā Śuklā (the second day of the bright moon) of Māgha (January-February). He entrusted the duties of the *sevā-pūjā* to Kṛṣṇadāsa Brahmācārī. At that time, there was no *vigraha* of Śrī Rādhikā with Śrī Madana-Mohanajī. Upon hearing the news of the manifestation of Śrī Madana-Mohanajī, Śrī Puroṣottama Jānā, the son of King Pratāparudra of Orissa, with great faith sent two *vigrahas* of Rādhā from Purī Dhāma to Vṛndāvana. Śrī Madana-Mohanajī informed the *pujārī* in his dream, “The taller of the two *vigrahas* from Purī is Lalitājī, and the shorter is Rādhājī.

You should place the *vighraha* of Rādhikā on My left side and the *vighraha* of Lalitā on My right side.” It is mentioned in *Bhakti-ratnākara* that Śrī Sanātana Gosvāmī built a temple for Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu in the southern part of Śrī Madana-Mohanajī’s temple, but Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu did not come to Vṛndāvana a second time.

In the new temple, Rādhikājī stands on Śrī Madana-Mohanajī’s left side and Lalitājī stands on His right side. A *śālāgrāma-śilā* is also there, and Śrī Jagannāthajī presides in a separate room (*prakoṣṭha*). Places of *darśana* to the west of the old temple are Śrī Sanātana Gosvāmī’s *bhajana-kuṭī*, *samādhi* and the *grantha-samādhi*.

Śrī Gopīnāthajī

Close to the famous Varṁsī Vaṭa, on the bank of the Yamunā, Śrī Paramānanda Bhaṭṭācārya and Madhu Paṇḍita used to worship Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa Yugala with extreme *vairāgya*. Once, the current of the Yamunā cut into her bank and a very beautiful *vighraha* of Śrī Gopīnātha mani-fested from under the sand. In the morning, when *bhakta* Paramānanda came to the Yamunā to take bath, he found this exceptional deity who stole his heart. He entrusted the *sevā* of Śrī Gopīnāthajī to Śrī Madhu Paṇḍita. First, Śrī Gopīnāthajī resided near Varṁsī Vaṭa, but later on a magnificent new temple was constructed elsewhere and His *sevā-pūjā* continued there.

Once, Nityānanda Prabhu’s wife Jāhnavā Ṭhākuraṇī came to Vṛndāvana. As she was having *darśana* of Śrī Rādhā-Gopīnāthajī, she thought that the *vighraha* of Rādhikā was too small and that, if Rādhikā had been a little taller, the Couple would look much more beautiful. Jāhnavā Ṭhākuraṇī returned to her residence after the *śayana-āratī darśana*. That night, in a dream, Śrī Gopīnāthajī asked Jāhnavā to arrange for a taller *vighraha* of Rādhikā. She received similar instructions from Śrīmatī Rādhikā, and had a *vighraha* of Her made that was a more appropriate size for the deity of Gopīnātha. *Bhakta-māla* describes that at the time of Jāhnavā Ṭhākuraṇī’s disappearance, she manifested her own *vighraha* and established herself in it. She instructed the *pujārīs* to install her *vighraha* in the *prakoṣṭha* of Śrī Gopīnāthajī. When this *vighraha* arrived at Gopīnātha Mandira in Vṛndāvana, the *pujārīs* hesitated to install her along side Śrī Gopīnāthajī. At that time, Gopīnāthajī Himself instructed the *pujārīs*, “Don’t hesitate. This is My beloved Anaṅga Maṣjarī. Place her on My left and Rādhikājī on My right.” And so it came to be that Jāhnavā stands on Śrī Gopīnāthajī’s left side and Rādhikājī stands on His right.

During the oppression of Aurangzeb, the original *vighrahas* of Gopīnāthajī, Rādhikā and Jāhnavā also proceeded to Jaipura together with other *vighrahas*. The *pratibhū vighrahas* now preside in the temple built by Nanda Kumāra Vasu. Jāhnavā Ṭhākuraṇī is seated on the left side of Gopīnāthajī, and a small *mūrti* of Rādhikā and Lalitā Sakhī are seated on His right. The *vighraha* of Mahāprabhu Śrī Gaurasundara is in a separate *prakoṣṭha*. In 1632 A.D., the old temple was built by Rāya Singha, the son of the king of Bīkānera,

Mahārāja Kalyāṇa-mala of the Rāṭhaur dynasty. Aurangzeb destroyed this temple. The *pratibhū vigrahas* were established in 1748 A.D., and the new temple was built in 1819 A.D. Near the new temple to the east is the *samādhi* of Madhu Paṇḍita.

Śrī Rādhā-Dāmodara

This temple is situated within the area of Sevā Kuṣja. Śrī Rūpa Gosvāmī used to live here in his *bhajana-kuṭī*. The contemporary Gosvāmīs and *bhaktas* assembled here for *iṣtagoṣṭhīs* and, in those gatherings of Vaiṣṇavas, Śrī Raghu-nātha Bhaṭṭajī would elucidate on *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* in his melodious voice. Śrī Rūpa Gosvāmī compiled *Śrī Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*, *Ujjvala-nīlamanī* and other sacred *bhakti* texts at this place. The young Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī was engaged in all kinds of *sevā* to Śrī Rūpa Gosvāmī, who personally manifested the *vigraha* of Śrī Rādhā-Dāmodara with his own hands and offered the *sevā-pūjā* to Śrī Jīva. According to the book *Sevā-prākāṭya*, Śrī Rādhā-Dāmodara were installed in *saṁvat* 1590 (1543 A.D.) in the month of Māgha (January-February) on Śuklā Daśamī (the tenth day of the bright half of the month). The original Śrī Rādhā-Dāmodara are now in Jaipura, and Their *pratibhū vigrahas*, which are as potent as the original deities, are in Vṛndāvana. On the altar with Them are Śrī Vṛndāvanacandra, Śrī Chailacikaniyā, Śrī Rādhā-Mādhava and a few others. The *samādhis* of Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī and Śrī Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī lie behind the temple, and in the northern area of the temple are the *samādhi* and *bhajana-kuṭī* of Śrī Rūpa Gosvāmī. Adjacent to this is the *samādhi* of Śrī Būgarbha Gosvāmī.

Sanātana Gosvāmī used to perform *parikramā* of Govardhana daily. In his old age, when he became incapable of performing *parikramā*, Kṛṣṇa came to him as a boy and gave him a *govardhana-śilā*, which was one and a half cubits long and shaped like a banyan leaf. He instructed Sanātana Gosvāmī to perform *parikramā* of this *śilā* instead. On this *śilā*, were imprints of Kṛṣṇa's foot, His *varṁśī*, and a cow's hoof. Sanātana Gosvāmī brought that *śilā* to Vṛndāvana and would circumambulate it daily. After his disappearance, Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī installed the *śilā* in Śrī Rādhā-Dāmodara Mandira and began to worship it. *Darśana* of this *śilā* is available on special request.

Śrī Rādhā-Ramaṇa

Śrī Rādhā-Ramaṇa is the deity of Śrī Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmī, the recipient of Śrīman Mahāprabhu's mercy. Śrī Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmī initially used to perform *sevā* of one *śālagrāma-śilā*. Once, he intensely desired to decorate his *śālagrāma*, to seat Him on a swing and sway Him back and forth, and to serve Him in many ways like a deity. "If only He had arms and legs like a deity," he thought. Prabhu is very kind to His *bhaktas*. To fulfil the desire of this *bhakta*, He transformed Himself that very night into the attractive threefold bending form of Śrī Rādhā-Ramaṇa. Śrī Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmī decorated Him with many ornaments, swung Him on a swing and offered *bhoga-rāga*

with great affection. If one has *darśana* of Śrī Rādhā-Ramaṇa's back, one will see that it resembles a *śālagrāma-śilā*. Although the deity is only twelve fingers tall, He is very attractive. Śrī Rādhā-Ramaṇa's lotus-face is like Śrī Govindajī's, His chest is like Śrī Gopīnāthajī's, and His lotus-feet are like Śrī Madana-Mohanajī's. By taking His *darśana*, one receives the benefit of taking *darśana* of these three deities.

According to the book *Sevā-prākāṣya*, Rādhā-Ramaṇajī manifested from the *śālagrāma-śilā* in *saṁvat* 1599 (1543 A.D.). His *abhiṣeka* took place on Pūrṇimā in the month of Vaiśākha (April-May) that same year. There is no *vigraha* of Śrī Rādhājī with Rādhā-Ramaṇajī, but a *gomatī-cakra* is worshipped on the altar to His left. According to an injunction in *Śrī Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*, a *gomatī-cakra* is to be worshipped along with a *śālagrāma-śilā*.

Adjacent to Śrī Rādhā-Ramaṇa Mandira, to the south, is the *samādhi* of Śrī Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmī and the place where Rādhā-Ramaṇajī manifested. Unlike other deities, Śrī Rādhā-Ramaṇajī never left Vṛndāvana.

Śrī Rādhā-Vinoda & Śrī Rādhā-Gokulānandajī

Before the arrival of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu in Vṛndāvana, Śrī Lokanātha Gosvāmī and Bhūgarbha Gosvāmī came here. Being very humble and without any possessions (*akiṣcana*), they used to perform *bhajana* at the many pastime-places in Braja Maṇḍala. Śrī Lokanātha Gosvāmī found the *vigraha* of Śrī Rādhā-Vinodajī in Kiśorī Kuṇḍa in Umrāo Gaon near Chatravana and served Them there. Later, on the request of Rūpa, Sanātana and the other Gosvāmīs, he brought his *ārādhya* Śrī Rādhā-Vinodajī to Vṛndāvana and began to worship Them near the Śrī Rādhā-Ramaṇa Mandira. Nowadays, the original deities that were worshipped by Śrī Lokanātha Gosvāmī are in Jaipura, and their *pratibhū vigrahas* are worshipped in that same temple in Vṛndāvana. Śrī Gokulānandajī, who manifested at Śrī Rādhā Kuṇḍa through Śrī Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura, also arrived in this temple later on. The *govardhana-śilā* given by Śrīman Mahāprabhu to Śrī Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī was also present here. The original *vigraha* of Śrī Gokulānanda is now also situated in Jaipura with Śrī Rādhā-Vinodajī. In the courtyard of the temple are the *samādhis* of Śrī Lokanātha Gosvāmī, Śrī Narottama Ṭhākura and Śrī Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura.

Śrī Sākṣī-Gopāla

West of the Śrī Govinda Mandira are the ruins of the Sākṣī-Gopāla Mandira. Gopālajī went to Vidyānagara to act as a witness. *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta* narrates the amazing story of Śrī Gopālajī, who is loving to His *bhaktas* (*bhaktavatsala*), in this case, an older and a younger *vipra*. Upon arriving at Vidyānagara, Śrī Gopālajī testified before the assembled people. He said, "The older *vipra* was very pleased with the *sevā* of the younger *vipra*, and promised to give his daughter in marriage to him. I am the witness to this statement." In time, this deity went to Śrī Jagannātha Purī and is now present

in Satyavādīpura, about twelve miles away from Purī. Now, Satyavādīpura is famous by the name of Sākṣī-Gopāla. Since then, the temple of Sākṣī-Gopāla in Vṛndāvana has been deserted. Today, only its ruins remain.

Śrī Madana-Mohana (the second)

The deity served by *vāñikāra* Śrī Gadādhara Bhaṭṭajī is situated here. This temple lies in the Bhaṭṭa neighbourhood opposite Śrī Rādhā-Vallabha Mandira. Here *samāja* (the singing of *līlās*) is performed with great celebration. The deity here is very beautiful.

Śrī Śyāmasundara

The temple of Śrī Śyāmasundarajī is situated near the Śrī Rādhā-Dāmodara Mandira. Śrī Rādhā-Śyāmasundara, the deities established and worshipped by *gauḍīya vedāntācārya* Śrī Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa, are very beautiful. Opposite the entrance door of the temple is the *samādhi* of Śrī Śyāmānanda Prabhu.

Śrī Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa was born in a village near the famous Remunā in Orissa. He studied grammar, *alañkāra* (rhetoric) and *nyāya śāstra* (logic) in an academic village on the bank of Cilkā Hrada. After this, he went to Mysore to study the *Vedas*. In Uḍupī, he deeply studied *Madhva-bhāṣya* along with *Śaṅkara-bhāṣya*, *Pārijāta-bhāṣya* and other *bhāṣyas* of the *Vedānta*. After some time, he studied the *Ṣaṭ-sandarbhās* under Śrī Rādhā-Dāmodara, a disciple of Śrī Rasikānanda Prabhu. At this time, he came to know of Śrī Rādhā-Dāmodara's profound scholarship and devout life and became his disciple. Later on, in Vṛndāvana, he studied *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* and the books of the Gosvāmīs from the famous *gauḍīya rasikācārya* Śrī Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura and, on his instruction, went to Jaipura. At the well-known Galtā in Jaipura, he defeated the scholars of the Śrī Sampradāya and other opponents to the Gauḍīya line, and established the *vigraha* of Śrī Vijaya Gopāla. To increase the faith of the local scholars, he composed his *Śrī Govinda-bhāṣya* on *Brahmasūtra* there, and reinstalled Śrī Rādhājī beside Śrī Govinda-devajī in the famous Govinda Mandira. Some of the books he composed, which have enlarged the treasure house of Śrī Gauḍīya-Vaiṣṇava literature, are *Govinda-bhāṣya*, *Siddhānta-ratnam*, *Vedānta-syāmantaka*, *Prameya-ratnāvalī*, *Siddhānta-darpaṇa*, and a commentary on *Ṣaṭ-sandarbha*.

Śrī Rādhā-Mādhava

Śrī Jayadeva Gosvāmī's deities used to reside in an ancient temple on the old bank of the Yamunā at Bhramara Ghāṭa, north of Śrī Gokulanānda Mandira. Nowadays, they are being served in an extensive temple in Jaipura at a hilly place known as Ghāṭī. This temple is prominent in Jaipura and is called Kanaka Vṛndāvana.

North-east of Śrī Rādhā-Mādhava Mandira is the large temple of Śrī Yugala-Kīśora. The dome of this temple is broken.

Śrī Bāṅke-Bihārī

Svāmī Haridāsaṁ manifested Śrī Bāṅke-Bihārī from Viśākhā Kuṇḍa in Nidhuvana. There is no *vigraha* of Śrī Rādhikā beside Kṛṣṇa in this temple. On Akṣaya Tṛtīyā in the month of Vaiśākhā, one can have *darśana* of Śrī Bāṅke-Bihārī's lotus feet. Śrī Bāṅke-Bihārī previously resided in Nidhu-vana, but then moved to the present temple. During the *yavana* oppression, Śrī Bāṅke-Bihārī secretly stayed in Vṛndāvana and did not leave. The *darśana* of Śrī Bāṅke-Bihārī is performed in a very special way. The curtain is drawn every few minutes, thus making the *darśana* very short. This is known as *jhāṅkī darśana*, 'momentary *darśana*'. The reason for this brief *darśana* is His *bhakta-vātsalya* (kindness to His devotees) and His *rasika* nature. The following pastime demonstrates this.

Once, an eminent *bhakta* came for Śrī Bāṅke-Bihārī's *darśana*. He gazed intently at the deity for a long time. *Rasika* Bāṅke-Bihārī became so attracted to him that He went with him to his village. Later, when the *gosvāmīs* of Bihārī came to know of this, they traced Him and, after much pleading with both the *bhakta* and Ṭhākuraṁ, brought Him back to the temple. After this incident, a *jhāṅkī darśana* was introduced so that no one again can gaze upon Him for a long time.

The unique feature of the Bāṅke-Bihārī Mandira is that there is no *maṅgala-āratī*. The *gosvāmīs* of this temple say that because Ṭhākuraṁ performs *rāsa-līlā* every night, He becomes exhausted and goes to sleep in the early morning. It is therefore improper to wake Him at that time.

Śrī Rādhā-Vallabha

This is the deity of Svāmī Śrī Hitahari-varṁsajī, who received the *vigraha* of Śrī Rādhā-Vallabha as dowry at his wedding. There is no *mūrti* of Śrī Rādhikā with Śrī Rādhā-Vallabha, but there is a crown on the altar instead, which is worship-ped as Śrī Rādhikā. This deity is very attractive.

Śrī Yugala-Kiśoraṁ

Yugala-Kiśoraṁ is situated in Kiśorīvana, or Vyāsagherā, near Śrī Sevā Kuṣja. Mādhava Dāsaṁ, a disciple of Śrī Mādhava-vendra Purī, was a famous *bhakta ācārya*. Śrī Nābhādāsaṁ has described his character in *Bhaktamāla*. His disciple, Abhi-rāma Vyāsa, a resident of Orachā, manifested this deity through Harirāma Vyāsaṁ. Nearby in the garden is the *samādhi* of Śrī Vyāsaṁ. There is a second Yugala-Kiśoraṁ whose temple lies on a hillock near Keśī Ghāṭa. Jhānnā-Pannā Rājā established this temple. During the reign of Mughal emperor Akbara, the two Rājapūta brothers Haridāsa Ṭhākura and Govinda dāsa Ṭhākura built the temple of a third Yugala-Kiśoraṁ. The brothers were from the family of Tomara and belonged to the village of Nīmkaṭhānā in Jaipura.

Śrī Lālā Bābū Mandira

Śrī Lālā Bābū was a famous and wealthy landlord of East Bengal. He used to go for walks a little distance from his mansion on the other side of the river, along its elegant bank. Once, as he was walking, he heard a boatman remark, “O brother, the day is over. Go across.” Hearing the boatman’s words, he became immersed in thoughts of his own mortality. Lālā Bābū took the boatman’s words to mean, “Life has reached its close. Quickly cross over this material existence.” He crossed the river by boat and returned home. The next day, during his walk, he heard the voice of a washerman addressing his wife, “The day is over; go and burn the *vāsanā*.” (Washermen burn banana plants and prepare a kind of alkali for washing clothes. In Bengali, the bark of the banana plant is called *vāsanā*. But, *vāsanā* also means ‘desire’ or ‘passion’.) Lālā Bābū took this remark to mean, “The day is over; the days of your life are also over. Quickly burn your lusty desires.” The statements of the boatman and the washerman left a deep impression on him. He abandoned his grandiose life and family and came to Vṛndāvana, where he began performing *bhajana*. The devotee Lālā Bābū installed the deity of Śrī Kṛṣṇacandra in 1810 A.D. in this magnificent stone temple.

Śāhajī Mandira

A resident of Lucknow, Seṭha Kundanalāla Śāha, constructed this grand, white marble-stone temple in 1835 A.D. at great expense. He was an unalloyed *bhakta* of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu. In present times, this temple gives some idea of the incomparable grandeur of Vṛndāvana.

Śrī Raṅgajī Mandira

In 1851 A.D., Śrī Lakṣmīcanda Seṭha built this temple at the expense of 4.5 million *rupees*. Following the style of the famous Śrī Raṅgam Mandira in South India, Śrī Raṅgajī presides in the main temple within many walls with Lakṣmī-devī massaging His feet. At the eastern gate of the temple is a huge Garuḍa-stambha, which is completely covered with gold leaf. The general public call it Sone kā Tāla Vṛkṣa, ‘The Golden Palm Tree’. Near the main entrance, in the north, is a *sarovara*, which displays the pastime of the fight between the elephant Gajendra and the crocodile. It also depicts Śrī Hari protecting the surrendered elephant. Near the western door is a huge chariot, upon which Śrī Raṅgajī rides on special occasions.

Śrījī Mandira

Mahārānī Ānanda-kumarī devī, the queen of Jayasingh, the king of Jaipura, had this temple constructed in 1826 A.D. Two *yugala-vigrahas* are installed here, Śrī Ānanda-Manohara and Śrī Vṛndāvanacandra.

Varddhamāna Mahārāja Kuṣja

This *kuṣja* is situated opposite Śrījī Mandira, on the other side of the road. The devotee queen Rājarājeśvarī-devī, wife of Śrī Kīrticānda, the *mahārāja* of

Varddhamān in Bengal, built the temple here. She also had the *ghāṭas* of Pāvana Sarovara in Nandagaon constructed out of stone.

Brahmacārī Ṭhākura-bāḍī

Mahārāja Jiyājī Sindhiyā of Gwalior built this magnificent temple in 1860 A.D. He offered the *sevā* of the deities to his *guru*, Śrī Giridhārī dāsa Brahmacārī. In this temple are three *vigrahas* – Śrī Rādhā-Gopāla, Haṁsa-Gopāla and Nitya-Gopāla – who preside in three separate *prakoṣṭhas*. This grand, stone temple is situated near the Lālā Bābū Mandira.

Śrī Ṭikārīrānī kī Ṭhākura-bāḍī

This temple is located in the northern part of Vṛndāvana on the bank of the Yamunā. It was built in 1871 A.D. by Queen Indrajīta Kumārī. Her husband was Hitakāma Ṭhākura, king of Ṭikarī in the district of Gayā in Bihāra. Three deities reside in this temple – Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, Śrī Rādhā-Gopāla and Śrī Laḍḍū-Gopāla. This temple is famous for its hospitality.

Śāhajāpura Mandira

This temple is located in Retiyā Bāzāra. The *dīvāna*, or court-minister, of Śāhajāpura state, Lālā Braja-kīśorajī, constructed it in 1873 A.D. The *vigraha* in this *mandira* is Śrī Rādhā-Gopāla, whose beautiful *darśana* is very grand.

Mahārānī Svarṇamayī Mandira

This temple is located near the bank of the Yamunā and was built by Mahārānī Svarṇamayī, wife of Kumāra Kṛṣṇanātha. He was the great grandson of the well-known Kānta Bābū of Kāsīma Bāzāra. Previously, a *vigraha* of Śrī Śyāmasundara was worshipped in this *mandira*. Now Śrī Gopīnāthajī, installed by Mahārānī, resides here.

Jaipura-vālā Mandira

Mahārāja Mādhosinghajī of Jaipura had this grand temple built over a period spanning almost thirty years and expended much money on it. The main temple has three doors. In the northern chamber is Śrī Ānanda-Bihārījī; in the central chamber is Śrī Rādhā-Mādhavajī; and in the southern chamber are Śrī Nitya-Gopālajī, Śrī Giridhārījī, and the *mūrtis* of Śrī Nāradaajī and Śrī Sanaka, Sanātana, Sanandana and Sanata Kumāra. The deities in this temple were installed in 1916 A.D.

Savāmana Śālagrāma

The huge Savāmana Śālagrāma presides in a two-storey temple in the corner of Loī Bāzār, opposite Śrī Śyāma-sundara Mandira. *Savāmana* refers to a weight of nearly forty-seven kilos. The deities of Śrī Sītā-Rāma are also here. In the old temple of Śrī Govindajī is another *śālagrāma* of *savāmana*.

Bankhaṇḍī Mahādeva

This temple is situated at the junction of three roads at the end of Aṭhkhambā, coming from the famous Bāṅke-Bihārī Mandira.

During his stay in Vṛndā-vana, Śrī Sanātana Gosvāmī resided in his *bhajana-kuṭī* near the old Śrī Madana-Mohana Mandira, and would daily go for *darśana* of Śrī Gopīśvara Mahādeva. When Sanātana Gosvāmī became old, Śrī Gopīśvara Mahādeva instructed him one day in a dream, “In your old age, please do not go to so much trouble to take my *darśana*. I shall manifest myself at Bankhaṇḍī near your *bhajana-kuṭī*.” That very next day, Śrī Gopīśvara Mahādeva appeared in Bankhaṇḍī. Seeing this, Sanātana Gosvāmī became overwhelmed in *bhāva*. From that day on, he would take *darśana* of Bankhaṇḍī Mahādeva each day before returning to his *bhajana-kuṭī*. Because Śrī Gopīśvara Mahādeva appeared in Bankhaṇḍī, Mahādeva here became known by the name Bankhaṇḍī Mahādeva.

Aṣṭa-sakhī Kuṣja

Aṣṭa-sakhī Kuṣja is situated near the old temple of Śrī Madana-Mohanajī. In the center is Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa Yugala, and surrounding Them are the *vigrahas* of eight *sakhīs*, four on each side. In 1296 A.D., the *mahārāja* of Hetamapura, Rāmaraṣjana Cakravartī, and his wife Padmāsundarī had this temple built and installed the *vigraha* of Śrī Rādhā-Rāsabihārī here.

Śrī Rādhā-Vinoda Jamāi Ṭhākura (Taḍāsa-vālā Mandira)

This temple is also called the Ṭhākura-bāḍī of Rājarṣi Rāya Vanamālī Dāsa. It is situated on the left side of an unpaved lane some distance from the main road that leads from Vṛndāvana to Mathurā. Śrī Vāṣchārāmajī, an official in the Taḍāsa state in Bengal, was a great devotee of Kṛṣṇa. Daily, he used to take bath in the flowing water of a nearby river. Once, while taking his morning bath, he heard a very sweet voice coming from inside the river. “Please take Me out of the water and take Me home,” the voice said. However Śrī Vāṣchārāmajī was unable to see the source of that voice in the nearby vicinity. The next day, the same thing happened. While bathing on the third day, he felt the touch of some-thing under the water at the same time that he heard the sweet voice. When he picked up the object that touched him, he saw that it was an amazingly beautiful *vigraha* of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. That same deity became famous by the name of Śrī Vinoda-Ṭhākura.

By His own will, Śrī Ṭhākurajī arrived at the house of the great devotee, Śrī Vanamālī Rāya, and the regular *sevā* of the *vigraha* began there. The only daughter of Śrī Vanamālī Rāyajī was very beautiful, very qualified, and especially devoted. When the princess had *darśana* of Śrī Vinoda-Ṭhākura, she became fascinated by His sweet smile. Śrī Vinoda-Ṭhākurajī also began to play directly with that girl whose name was Rādhā. One day, He caught the corner of the princess’s *sari* and said, “You should marry Me.” After some time, the princess became ill. Ṭhākura Vinodajī told Rādhā’s mother in a dream, “Rādhā will not survive now. You should make one *mūrti* of Rādhā from the wood of the dry cedar tree in your garden and marry Her to Me.” And so it happened that as soon as the *mūrti* of Rādhā was installed, the

princess Rādhā passed away. The cremation of princess Rādhā was carried out as Rādhā's *mūrti* was being installed beside Ṭhākura Vinodajī. Śrī Vinoda Ṭhākura now became Śrī Rādhā-Vinoda-bihārī Ṭhākura. After some time, Śrī Vanamālī Rāyabahādura went to Vṛndāvana and brought Śrī Rādhā-Vinoda-bihārī Ṭhākurajī with him. He constructed a temple at this place and established Ṭhākurajī there. Rājarṣi Rāya Vanamālī Dāsa was a greatly pious *mahāpuruṣa* of the Śrī Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava Sampradāya. He published one edition of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* with eight commentaries in the *devanāgarī* script. In about 1954 A.D., *paramārādhyā om viṣṇupāda* Śrī Śrīmad Bhakti Prajāna Keśava Gosvāmī Mahārāja collected a copy of this *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* with eight commentaries from the Taḍāsa Mandira. This book is still well-kept in the library of Śrī Keśavajī Gauḍīya Maṭha in Mathurā.

Śrī Rūpa-Sanātana Gauḍīya Maṭha

This temple has been mentioned earlier in the book. It is situated in Dāna, Māna and Sevā Kuṣja Galīs near Sevā Kuṣja. Presiding here are the wonderful *vigrahas* of Śrī Gaurāṅga Mahāprabhu, Śrī Śrī Rādhā-Vinoda-bihārī, Śrī Vṛndādevī and Śrīla Bhakti Prajāna Keśava Mahārāja. In Vṛndāvana, Śrī Vṛndādevī's *darśana* is available only in this temple. On the upper floor of the *mandira*, one can have an exquisite *darśana* of Sevā Kuṣja.

Śrī Kṛṣṇa-Balarāma Mandira

This temple was established in 1975 by Śrī Śrīmad Bhakti-vedānta Svāmī Mahārāja, and is situated in Ramaṇa Reti on the Vṛndāvana-Chaṭṭikarā road. The presiding deities in this temple are Śrī Śrī Kṛṣṇa-Balarāma in the middle *prakoṣṭha*, Śrī Śrī Rādhā-Śyāmasundara with Lalitā and Viśākhā in the *prakoṣṭha* on the right and Śrī Śrī Gaura-Nitāi in the *prakoṣṭha* on the left. At the side is a *mūrti* of Śrīla Bhaktivedānta Svāmī Mahārāja. The *samādhimandira* of Śrīla Bhaktivedānta Svāmī Mahārāja is also here. In his last years, Śrīla Svāmī Mahārāja asked the author to place him in *samādhi*, and thus this ceremony took place during Kartika (November) in 1977. Śrī Śrīmad Bhaktivedānta Svāmī Mahārāja used to call Bombay his office, Māyapura his *sādhana-bhūmi*, and Vṛndāvana his *nitya-siddha* abode.

The Twelve Forests of Śrī Vṛndāvana

Within the *paśca-kosī parikramā* of Vṛndāvana, there are twelve *vanas*, or forests. A brief description of them is given below.

1. Śrī Aṭalavana

This *vana* lies in the southern part of Vṛndāvana. Aṭala Tīrtha and Aṭala Bihārījī are situated here. At Bhātrōla, Śrī Kṛṣṇa and the *sakhās* relished the many palatable dishes that the wives of the *brāhmaṇas* gave them. When they came to this place as they were returning to Chaṭṭikarā Nanda-Gokula, Kṛṣṇa's friends asked Him about the palatable foodstuffs they had taken earlier that day. "He *sakhe!* How was the food today?" they inquired.

With great delight, Kṛṣṇa replied, “I have become immov-able, having taken that food.” In other words, Kṛṣṇa was feeling so full that He was unable to continue further. Since then, this forest has become famous by the name Aṭalavana (in Hindi, the word for ‘immovable’ or ‘stationary’ is *aṭala*). It is situated near the junction of the Vṛndāvana-Mathurā road and the Vṛndāvana *paśca-kosī parikramā* path.

2. Kevārivana

This forest is situated north-west of Aṭalavana and contains Dāvānala Kuṇḍa, which has been described earlier. After Kṛṣṇa swallowed the forest fire (*dāvānala*), the *gopas* and *gopīs* looked around with great surprise and said, *Ke nivāri?* (“Who has saved us from the hands of death?”). For this reason, this forest became famous as Kevārivana.

3. Bihāravana

This forest is situated south-west of Kevārivana. It is here that Rādhā Kūpa is found. The pilgrims performing Vṛndāvana *parikramā* use to loudly call “Rādhē! Rādhē!” into this well and hear the echo. Nearby in Ramaṇa Retī are *āśramas* of renounced *mahātmās*. At Śrī Bhāgavat Nivāsa, one can also have *darśana* of Śrī Giridhārī and the *guṣṭā-mālā* worshipped by Śrī Dāsa Gosvāmī. *Pūjyapāda* Śrī Bhaktihṛdaya Bon Mahārāja, a disciple of *jagad-guru* Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Prabhupāda, established a spi-ritual ‘Viśva-vaiṣṇava-vidyālaya’ here.

4. Gocāraṇavana

This forest is situated to the west of Bihāravana on the old bank of the Yamunā. A temple of Śrī Varāha Deva and Gautama Muni’s *āśrama* are here.

5. Śrī Kālīya Damanavana

This forest lies north of Gocāraṇavana and contains many ancient *kadamba* trees. Among them is the *keli-kadamba* tree on which Śrī Kṛṣṇa climbed to a high branch, tied His *pītāmbara* around His waist and jumped into the Yamunā to subdue the Kālīya serpent. This tree is a *keli-kadamba* tree and also known as Keli-Kadamba, because Kṛṣṇa performed a pastime (*keli*) here. Adjacent to this *keli-kadamba* is the *bhajana-kuṭī* and *samādhi* of Śrī Prabodhānanda Sarasvatī. Nearby on the bank of Kālīya Dāha is Śrīla Bilvamaṅgalajī’s place of *bhajana*.

Śrī Bilvamaṅgalajī was a resident of a village on the bank of the Kṛṣṇabenvā river in South India. In his youth, he became so attached to Cintāmaṇi, a beautiful prostitute, that he even went to meet her on the day of his father’s *śrāddha* ceremony. With the help of a decayed corpse, he crossed the fearsome river that had overflowed its banks. Then after scaling a wall by grasping a black snake, thinking it to be a rope, he arrived at the prostitute’s house. The prostitute scolded him, saying, “If you had the same deep attachment for the lotus feet of Śrī Kṛṣṇa that you have for my bones, skin and body which is covered with foul smelling dirt, then your auspiciousness

would be guaranteed.” When Bilvamaṅgala heard this, he became detached from worldly existence and proceeded to Vṛndāvana. On the way, he met a young woman to whom he became attracted. Taking a sharp pin, he pierced his eyes and became blind. The playful *rasika* Kṛṣṇa then bestowed His mercy upon Bilvamaṅgala and brought him to Vṛndāvana, where he stayed for some time at Govardhana. There, he received a momentary *darśana* of his *iṣṭadeva* Śrī Kṛṣṇa and *iṣṭadevī* Śrī Rādhikā. After some time, he came to Vṛndāvana and resided near Kālīya Daha, where he performed *bhajana*. It is said that after about seven hundred years, he transmitted his *śakti* into Śrī Vallabhācārya and gave him the *tattva* (truth) of his disciplic line. He performed his disappearance *līlā* here.

6. Śrī Gopālavana

This forest is situated north of Kālīya Damanavana. The deities of Śrī Nanda and Yaśodājī are in the temple here. After Kṛṣṇa subdued the Kālīya serpent, Śrī Nanda Bābā donated a vast number of cows to the *brāhmaṇas* for Kṛṣṇa’s welfare.

7. Nikuṣjavana

This forest is also named Sevā Kuṣja. Nearby are four *galīs*, or narrow lanes. They are Dāna Galī, Māna Galī, Gumāna Galī and Kuṣja Galī. This is where Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa enjoy Their eternal pastimes, and where *parama rasika* Kṛṣṇa massages the lotus feet of the fatigued Rādhājī. We have already described Lalitā Kuṇḍa and the other places in this forest.

8. Nidhuvana

This famous forest is situated north of Nikuṣjavana. Viśākhā Kuṇḍa, from where Śrī Bānke-Bihārījī manifested, is here. This was mentioned earlier.

9. Rādhāvana (Rādhā Bāga)

This forest is located in the north-east corner of Vṛndāvana, on the bank of the Yamunā. It is said that after Śrīmatī Rādhikā took bath, Lalitā and the other *sakhīs* would comb Her hair and decorate Her here. Svāmī Haridāsa’s place of *bhajana* as well as Ṭaṭṭiyā Sthāna, which is very attractively decorated with densely-foliated trees, are here. This place is very famous for the *sevā* of the *sādhus* and saintly personalities.

10. Jhūlanavana

This forest is situated south of Śrī Rādhā Bāga and is where the *sakhīs* used to swing Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa Yugala. Here, *raṅgile* Kṛṣṇa would also seat Śrīmatī Rādhikā, Lalitā, Viśākhā and the other *sakhīs* one by one beside Him on a swing. He would then swing them with such a force that they would no longer be able to keep their bodies covered with their clothes and, out of fear, they would cling to Śrī Kṛṣṇa. The Gauḍīya Gosvāmīs have described the *jhūlana-līlā* (swing pastime) of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa in their literatures.

11. Śrī Gahvaravana

This forest is situated south of Jhūlanavana, and is where the famous Pānī Ghāṭa lies. Here the *gopīs*, on the advice of Kṛṣṇa, crossed the overflowing Yamunā on their way to the *āśrama* of Maharṣi Durvāsā and fed him fifty-six different kinds of preparations. This has been described earlier.

12. Śrī Papaḍavana

This forest lies south of Gahvaravana. Ādi Badrīvana and Ādi Badrīghaṭa are also situated here. At this place, Śrī Kṛṣṇa arranged for the *gopīs* to take *darśana* of Ādi Badrīnātha. It is also said that Śrī Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana Vyāsadeva received the inspiration to manifest *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* here. In the rough and dry Badrikāśrama in the Himālayas, it is impossible to manifest such a literature which is filled with *rasa* and which is saturated with the sweet *līlās* of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Even now, an extensive forest of *ber* or *badrī* trees is found in this area. It may be that Śrī Vyāsadeva also taught the *rasa-grantha Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* to Śukadeva Gosvāmī at this place.

The Famous Ghāṭas of Śrī Vṛndāvana

There are numerous *ghāṭas* on the banks of Śrī Yamunā in Vṛndāvana. Of them, those that are renowned are described below.

Śrī Varāha Ghāṭa

This *ghāṭa* is situated in the south-western part of Vṛndāvana on the old bank of the Yamunājī. Śrī Varāha Deva is also present on top of the bank. Nearby is the *āśrama* of Gautama Muni.

Kālīya Damana Ghāṭa

This *ghāṭa* is also called Kālīya Dahan, and is situated on the old bank of the Yamunā about half a mile north of Varāha Ghāṭa. The pastime of this place has already been described. When Śrī Kṛṣṇa reached the riverbank after subduing Kālīya, Brajarāja Nanda and Brajeśvarī Śrī Yaśodā soaked Him with their tears, and very carefully and thoroughly examined His body. They wondered, “Has our *lālā* been hurt anywhere?” Here, Mahārāja Nanda donated many cows to the *brāhmaṇas* for Kṛṣṇa’s welfare.

Sūrya Ghāṭa

This *ghāṭa* is also called Āditya Ghāṭa, and is situated north of Gopāla Ghāṭa. The hillock above this *ghāṭa* is called Āditya Ṭīlā. On this *ṭīlā* stands the temple of Śrī Madana-Mohanajī, the life and soul of Śrī Sanātana Gosvāmī. This has also been described earlier. Praskandana Tīrtha is also here.

Yugala Ghāṭa

This *ghāṭa* is situated north of Sūrya Ghāṭa. Above this *ghāṭa* is Śrī Yugala-Bihārī Mandira. It is in a dilapidated state and is without a dome. A temple of Śrī Yugala-Kīśora near Keśī Ghāṭa is in a similar dilapidated condition.

Śrī Vihāra Ghāṭa

This *ghāṭa* is situated north of Yugala Ghāṭa and is where Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa Yugala used to bathe, perform *jal-vihāra*, and engage in many other games (*krīḍā*).

Śrī Āndhera Ghāṭa

This *ghāṭa* is found north of Yugala Ghāṭa. Kṛṣṇa and the *gopīs* used to play ‘blind man’s bluff’ in the *upavana* adjacent to this *ghāṭa*. The *gopīs* would cover their eyes with their hands while Śrī Kṛṣṇa hid somewhere nearby. The *gopīs* would then search for Him. Sometimes, Śrī Kīśorījī would also hide in this way and everyone else would look for Her.

Imlītalā Ghāṭa

This *ghāṭa* is north of Āndhera Ghāṭa. When Mahāprabhu Śrī Caitanya Deva was residing in Vṛndāvana, He would sit under the *imlī* tree here. This *imlī* tree was ancient and had survived from the time of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Mahāprabhu would perform *harināma* here, completely absorbed in *prema*. Therefore, this *ghāṭa* is also known as Gaurāṅga Ghāṭa. This pastime-place has also been mentioned earlier.

Śṛṅgāra Ghāṭa

This *ghāṭa* is situated somewhat to the east of Imalītalā Ghāṭa, on the bank of the Yamunā. Śrī Kṛṣṇa decorated *māninī* Śrī Rādhikā at this place. During His visit to Vṛndāvana, Śrī Nityānanda Prabhu used to bathe here. He stayed at the nearby Śṛṅgāra Vaṭa for some time.

Śrī Govinda Ghāṭa

This *ghāṭa* is situated near Śṛṅgāra Ghāṭa, to the north. After Śrī Kṛṣṇa disappeared from *śrī rāsa-maṇḍala*, He again appeared in front of the *gopīs* at this place.

Cīra Ghāṭa

The mischievous Śrī Kṛṣṇa stole the clothes of the young *gopīs* while they were bathing and climbed up a *kadamba* tree. *Cīra* means ‘clothes’. Kṛṣṇa also rested near here after killing the Keśī demon. Therefore, another name for this *ghāṭa* is Caina (*caina* means ‘rest’) or Cayana Ghāṭa. Nearby is the well known Jhāḍū-maṇḍala.

Śrī Bhramara Ghāṭa

This *ghāṭa* is located north of Cīra Ghāṭa. When Kīśora and Kīśorī performed *krīḍā-vilāsa* here, bumble bees (*bhramara*) became intoxicated by the fragrance of Their bodies and started humming. This *ghāṭa* is therefore called Bhramara Ghāṭa.

Śrī Keśī Ghāṭa

This famous *ghāṭa* is situated north of Bhramara Ghāṭa in the north-western part of Śrī Vṛndāvana, and has already been described.

Dhīra-samīra Ghāṭa

This *ghāṭa* is situated in the northern part of Śrī Vṛndāvana and near Keśī Ghāṭa, to the east. When the breeze witnessed the *vihāra* of Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa Yugala, it at once became very cool and started to move very slowly so that it could serve Them. This place has also been described pre-viously.

Śrī Rādhā Bāga Ghāṭa

This *ghāṭa* is situated in the eastern part of Vṛndāvana. It has also been described before.

Śrī Pānī Ghāṭa

The *gopīs* crossed the Yamunā on foot from this *ghāṭa* and fed Maharṣi Durvāsā delicious food. This too has been described previously.

Ādibadrī Ghāṭa

This *ghāṭa* is situated a little south of Pānī Ghāṭa. Śrī Kṛṣṇa gave *darśana* of Ādibadrī Nārāyaṇa to the *gopīs* at this place.

Śrī Rāja Ghāṭa

Rāja Ghāṭa is situated in the south-eastern part of Vṛndāvana, to the south of Ādibadrī Ghāṭa and on the bank of Yamunā's old course. Dressed as a boatman, Kṛṣṇa used to take Śrīmatī Rādhikā and the *sakhīs* across the Yamunā from here. When they would reach the mid-point of the Yamunā, Kṛṣṇa would make many excuses to delay their crossing. The *gopīs* would order Him to cross the river quickly, and try to scare Him by mentioning the name of Mahārāja Kamsa. Thus, this *ghāṭa* is famous by the name of Rāja Ghāṭa.

In addition to these famous *ghāṭas* already described, the book *Vṛndāvana-kathā* mentions another fourteen *ghāṭas*: (1) Mahāntajī Ghāṭa, (2) Nāmāovālā Ghāṭa, (3) Praskandana Ghāṭa, (4) Kaḍiyā Ghāṭa, (5) Dhūsara Ghāṭa, (6) Nayā Ghāṭa, (7) Śrījī Ghāṭa, (8) Bihārījī Ghāṭa, (9) Dharoyāra Ghāṭa, (10) Nāgarī Ghāṭa, (11) Bhīma Ghāṭa, (12) Himmata Bahādura Ghāṭa, (13) Cīra or Caina Ghāṭa, and (14) Hanu-māna Ghāṭa.

Other Features of Śrī Vṛndāvana

Vṛndāvana's quarters (muḥallās)

- | | |
|--------------------|------------------------|
| 1) Jṣāna-Gudaḍī | 29) Sukhanakhātā Galī |
| 2) Gopīśvara | 30) Purānā Śahara |
| 3) Baṁśīvaṭa | 31) Lārivālī Galī |
| 4) Gopīnātha Bāga | 32) Gāvadhūpa Galī |
| 5) Gopīnātha Bāzār | 33) Govardhana Darvāzā |
| 6) Brahma Kuṇḍa | 34) Ahīrapāḍā |
| 7) Rādhā Nivāsa | 35) Dumāīta Pāḍā |

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- 8) Keśī Ghāṭa 36) Varaoyāra Muhallā
 9) Rādhā-Ramaṇa Gherā 37) Madana-Mohanajī Gherā
 10) Nidhuvana 38) Bihārīpurā
 11) Pāthara Purā 39) Purohitavālī Galī
 12) Nāgara-gopīnātha 40) Manīpāḍā
 13) Gopīnātha Gherā 41) Gautamapāḍā
 14) Nāgara-gopāla 42) Aṭhkhambā
 15) Cīra Ghāṭa 43) Govindabāga
 16) Maṇḍī Darvāzā 44) Loī Bāzār
 17) Nāgara-govindajī 45) Retiyā Bāzār
 18) Ṭaksāla Galī 46) Bankhaṇḍī Mahādeva
 19) Rāmājī Dvāra 47) Chīpī Galī
 20) Kaṇṭhīvālā Bāzār 48) Rāya Galī
 21) Sevā Kuṣja 49) Bundelabāga
 22) Kuṣja Galī 50) Mathurā Darvāzā
 23) Vyāsa Gherā 51) Savāī Jayasīmha Gherā
 24) Śṛṅgāra Vaṭa 52) Dhīra-samīra
 25) Rāsa-maṇḍala 53) Ṭaṭṭiyā Sthāna
 26) Kiśorapurā 54) Gahvaravana
 27) Dhobīvālī Galī 55) Govinda Kuṇḍa
 28) Raṅgīlāla Galī 56) Rādhābāga

Vṛndāvana's famous samāja-samādhis

- 1) Sanātana Gosvāmī's *samādhi* lies near Āditya Ṭilā, in the southern part of the old Śrī Madana-Mohanajī Mandira. The *grantha-samādhi*, or *samādhi* of the Gosvāmī literatures is also here.
- 2) Śrī Rūpa Gosvāmī's *samādhi* is near Śrī Rādhā-Dāmodara Mandira, to the left. The *samādhi-mandiras* of Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī and Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja lie behind the main *mandira*.
- 3) Śrī Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmī's *samādhi* is near Śrī Rādhā-Ramaṇa Mandira.
- 4) Lokanātha Gosvāmī's *samādhi* lies near Śrī Gokulānanda Mandira. Next to Lokanātha Gosvāmī's *samādhi* are the *samādhis* of Śrī Narottama Ṭhākura and Śrī Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura.
- 5) Śrī Madhu Paṇḍita Gosvāmī's *samādhi* is near Śrī Gopīnātha Mandira.
- 6) Śrī Raghunātha Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmī's *samādhi* lies in the centre of the *puṣpa-samādhis* of the sixty-four Gauḍīya *mahantas* opposite Śrī Govinda Mandira. The *samādhis* of the six *cakravartīs* and eight *kavirājas* are also there.
- 7) The *samādhis* of Śrīnivāsa Ācārya and Śrī Rāmacandra Kavirāja are in Dhīra-samīra.
- 8) Śrī Śyāmānanda Prabhu's *samāja-bāḍī* is near Śrī Śyāma-sundara Mandira.

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- 9) Śrī Gadādhara Paṇḍita Gosvāmī's *danta-samāja* (tooth-*samādhī*) is in Keśī Ghāṭa.
 - 10) Śrī Prabodhānanda Sarasvatī's *samādhī* lies near Kālīya Daha.
 - 11) Svāmī Haridāśajī's *samādhī* is in Nidhuvana.
 - 12) Śrī Hitahari-varṇśa Gosvāmī's place is near Śrī Rādhā-Vallabha Mandira.
 - 13) Sūradāsa Madana-Mohanajī's place lies near Śrī Madana-Mohana Mandira.

Vṛndāvana's famous kuṇḍas

- 1) Dāvānala Kuṇḍa – in Kevārivana
- 2) Śrī Viśākhā Kuṇḍa – in Nidhuvana
- 3) Śrī Gajarāja Kuṇḍa – in Śrī Raṅgajī Mandira
- 4) Śrī Lalitā Kuṇḍa – in Nikuṣjavana
- 5) Śrī Brahma Kuṇḍa – to the north of Śrī Raṅgajī Mandira
- 6) Śrī Govinda Kuṇḍa – near Śrī Raṅgajī Mandira, in the eastern part of Vṛndāvana

Vṛndāvana's famous wells (kūpas)

- 1) Veṇu Kūpa – near Śrī Raṅgajī Mandira
- 2) Sapta-Sānudrika Kūpa – near Gopīśvara Mahādeva
- 3) Śrī Gopa Kūpa – in Jṣāna-Gudaḍī
- 4) Śrī Rādhā Kūpa – in Bihāravana

Devīs in Vṛndāvana

- 1) Pātāla-devī, or Yogamāyā – to the south-west of the ancient Govindajī Mandira
- 2) Annapūrṇa-devī – near Sevā Kuṣja
- 3) Paurṇamāsī-devī – near Sevā Kuṣja, to the east

Mahādevas in Vṛndāvana

- 1) Śrī Gopīśvara Mahādeva – near Varṇśī Vaṭa, to the north-east
- 2) Bankhaṇḍī Mahādeva – at the intersection of Loī Bāzār and Athkhambā

Vṛndāvana's banyan trees (vaṭas)

- 1) Advaita Vaṭa – near the ancient Madana-Mohana Mandira
- 2) Śṛṅgāra Vaṭa – on the bank of the Yamunā near Śrī Rādhā-Dāmodara Mandira
- 3) Varṇśī Vaṭa – in Rāsa-sthalī

Vṛndāvana's kadamba trees

- 1) Keli Kadamba – on the bank of Kālīya Daha

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- 2) Cīra Kadamba - on the bank of the Yamunā, near Dhīra-
samīra
- 3) Dolā Kadamba - in the Rādhā Bāga Jhūlanavana